

# THE MYTH OF SAINT THOMAS AND THE MYLAPORE SHIVA TEMPLE



ISHWAR SHARAN



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AND THE MYLAPORE SHIVA TEMPLE





**The Myth of Saint Thomas  
and The Mylapore Shiva Temple**

**ISHWAR SHARAN**

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Cover drawing of Sri Kapaleeswara  
by Swami Madhurananda of Madras

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© AUTHOR

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FOR THE  
LORD OF MYLAPORE  
AND HIS  
FAVOURED SONS  
JNANASAMBANDAR  
AND  
ARUNAGIRINATHAR  
WHO OFFER  
THE BEST EVIDENCE



## SOME COMMENTS RECEIVED

"I am indebted to you for this book."

*Dr. Swami Gitananda,  
Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry*

"We welcome this book as a much needed exposure of a deliberately, widely spread falsehood... Until 312 A.D. Christians were small insignificant groups. It was only when the tyrannical, whimsical and haughty Roman emperor Constantine joined them that he ordered his Roman legions to impose Christianity with terror and torture. Therefore the traditional Christian assertion that St. Thomas arrived in india as early as 52 A.D. is a deliberately spread canard."

*P.N. Oak,  
Institute for Rewriting Indian History, Pune*

"Ishwar Sharan takes cudgels against the attempt of the Christian missionaries who try to denigrate the Hindus and create an artificial legend about the sanctity of the present Santhome Church."

*The Vedanta Kesari, Madras*

"The Paramacharya Swamigal is very pleased."

*S. Balasubramaniam,  
Madurai Adinam, Madurai*

"Thank you ... but I have to inform you that I have nothing to do with these matters."

*M.A. D'Couto, Madras*

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

"This book will have tremendous action and reaction that will be productive for further research."

*Dr. T. Edmunds,  
T.B.M. Lutheran College, Porayar*

"The demolition of lies, deceptions and chicanery is a noble undertaking, but likely to make enemies."

*Dr. N. Mahadevan, Madras*

"This is a very interesting book which brings out how history has been distorted by our foreign rulers to conceal their misdeeds and how even today these myths are accepted as real history by almost everyone in this country including the Government itself."

*Tapovan Prasad, Madras*

"The St. Thomas story was concocted to subdue the opposition to the spreading of Christianity in India."

*Kamakoti, Madras*

"The author ... repudiates the claim of Christianity being a native Indian religion."

*East and West Series, Pune*

"This book is the key to open the lid which covers the golden truth of history that would add to the glory of the gentle Hindus and expose the evil character of mischievous foreign elements which are ever active to sow seeds of discordance in India."

*Prabuddha Bharata, Mayavati*

"I appreciate your interest in exposing the real facts connected with the legend of St. Thomas."

*Dr. K. Seshadri,  
Annamalai University, Chidambaram*

"Jesus is coming again. He will receive me. He is coming again. To receive me to glory."

*G. Jayasingh, Madras*



*Some Comments Received*

"This book is a very valuable one and it will be kept in our library for the benefit of visiting devotees."

*Swami Guhananda,  
Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, Tirupparaitturai*

"This book is a new addition to a recent series of publications from Voice of India on interfaith issues or encounters of Hindus with Christians and Muslims.... These writings present a very important material worth deserving and demanding attention of historians and other scholars, particularly those of non-Hindu traditions whose accounts or writings have now been questioned and challenged."

*The Journal of Religious Studies,  
Punjabi University, Patiala*

"So-called modern prophets and research scholars ... and their apostles like Ishwar Sharan remind us of the Tamil saying: 'The dog looks at the mountain and barks.'"

*Lalitha Eapen, Madras*

"The author has ... taken pains to collect the information with regard to [San Thome Cathedral and the Mylapore Shiva Temple] and make it available to the common man. He deserves to be congratulated for his endeavor."

*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*

"Any honest reader would be convinced, beyond any shadow of a doubt."

*Bulletin of the Society of Hindu Missionaries, Bombay*

"A valuable gift."

*Swami Krishnananda,  
Divine Life Society, Rishikesh*

"I shall read it with interest."

*Norma Louis, Bombay*



## CONTENTS

Author's Note	xiii
<b>PART ONE</b>	
Foreword by Koenraad Elst	5
Introduction	7
The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple	10
<b>PART TWO</b>	
Archbishop Arulappa Makes History	129
— K.P. Sunil	
Acharya Paul Adds a Footnote	137
— Ganesh Iyer & K.P. Sunil	
“Dr.” Deivanayakam Gets His Due	145
— R.S. Narayanaswami	
<b>PART THREE</b>	
In Memory of a Slain Saint	151
— C.A. Simon	
The Legend of a Slain Saint to Stain Hinduism	160
— Swami Tapasyananda	
Tainted People	170
— Harry Miller	

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

PART FOUR

Saint Thomas and Caste	177
Anti-Brahminism	186
— Koenraad Elst	
Churches Threaten Dalit Rights	195
— Leela Tampi	

PART FIVE

Hideaway Communalism in the Indian Express	209
Hideaway Communalism in The Hindu	220
Madras Musings and Other Media Meditations	225
Saint Thomas — A TTK Product	232
News Item	235
— H.V.I.	

APPENDIXES

Temple Looting in Kerala — Then and Now	239
— Leela Tampi	
Towards a Real Hindu-Christian Dialogue	251
— Koenraad Elst	

BIBLIOGRAPHY	272
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INDEX	278
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is a revised and enlarged edition of a twenty-page essay, with appended articles, that appeared in 1991 in response to an *Indian Express* feature on St. Thomas. It includes everything in the original plus many new and important references. Pulavar Ved Prakash, Tamil and religious scholar, has generously shared his research materials and supplied the Tamil translations. His help has made this book possible and we are grateful to him. Dr. Koenraad Elst, K.P. Sunil, Leela Tampi, and the late Swami Tapasyananda of the Sri Ramakrishna Math in Mylapore, have also made valuable contributions. What was originally an introduction to the study of the myth of St. Thomas and the destruction of a great Shiva temple, has now begun to take the shape of a broader investigation into the Christian presence in South India.

In the main essay of this book we have traced the St. Thomas legend in some detail, from its origin in third century Mesopotamia to its commercial and communal manifestations in Madras today. It is a complicated story and the reader will have to pay close attention. The learned criticism that we have not referred to original sources is not true. There is only one original source, the *Acts of Thomas*, and we have reviewed it in detail. The other learned criticism, that our thesis is lopsided and subjective, is indeed true, and we can only ask the indulgence of the trained research scholar. He may treat this work as an expanded bibliography compiled to encourage professionals like himself.

who have so far ignored this subject, to do some research.

The first edition of this book was received with great interest by the reading public, as the comments at the beginning of this edition attest to, and our faith in their critical intelligence remains. They have been kept in the dark for too long by too many Marxist professors, "secular" newspaper editors, and well-paid Christian historians, and it is to the eternal credit of Voice of India that some of this darkness has been dispelled and some accountability introduced into the study and writing of Indian history.



## PART ONE



What have been  
Christianity's fruits?  
Superstition, bigotry  
and persecution.

— James Madison



## FOREWORD

According to Christian leaders in India, the apostle Thomas came to India in 52 A.D., founded the Syrian Christian Church, and was killed by the fanatical Brahmins in 72 A.D. Near the site of his martyrdom, the St. Thomas Church was built. In fact this apostle never came to India and the Christian community in South India was founded by a merchant Thomas Cananeus in 345 A.D. (a name which readily explains the Thomas legend). He led four hundred refugees who fled persecution in Persia and were given asylum by the Hindu authorities. In Catholic universities in Europe, the myth of the apostle Thomas going to India is no longer taught as history, but in India it is still considered useful. Even many vocal "secularists" who attack the Hindus for "relying on myth" in the Ayodhya affair, off-hand profess their belief in the Thomas myth. The important point is that Thomas can be upheld as a martyr and the Brahmins decried as fanatics.

In reality, the missionaries were very disgruntled that the damned Hindus refused to give them martyrs (whose blood is welcomed as "the seed of the faith"), so they had to invent one. Moreover, the church which they claim commemorates St. Thomas's martyrdom at the hands of Hindu fanaticism, is in fact a monument of Hindu martyrdom at the hands of Christian fanaticism. It is a forcible replacement of two important Hindu temples (Jain and Shaiva) whose existence was insupportable to the Christian missionaries. No one knows how many priests and worshippers were killed when the Christian soldiers came to

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

remove the curse of Paganism from the Mylapore beach. Hinduism doesn't practice martyr-mongering, but if at all we have to speak of martyrs in this context, the title goes to these Jina- and Shiva-worshippers and not to the apostle Thomas.

• KOENRAAD ELST<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Excerpted from *Negationism in India: Concealing the Record of Islam*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1992.



## INTRODUCTION

The myth of St. Thomas is a prototype of today's popular Jesus-in-India story. The first was invented by the Syrian Christians of Malabar and later taken over by the Portuguese, and the second was promoted around the beginning of this century by western spiritualists who also paraded as historians of the arcane.<sup>1</sup> Both fictions are attractive to foreign spiritual seekers and to convent-educated Hindus who fancy the idea that an apostle of Jesus, or Jesus himself, may have visited India. The Hindus do not notice that in these legends neither Thomas nor Jesus are presented as seekers of truth or admirers of Hindu religion and culture. They are presented instead as teachers of a superior truth or as enlightened social reformers who are persecuted by avaricious and degenerate Pagan priests. Whether the legends are set in Palayur or Mylapore as is the case with Thomas, or Puri and Benares as is the case with Jesus, the theme of martyrdom is the same. The "superior" teachings of both men are rejected and their lives threatened by "reactionary" caste Hindus. Thomas is murdered on a hilltop near Madras and Jesus is stoned and driven from the country by a mob — only to return and marry a princess of Kashmir after surviving the Crucifixion.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See Nicolas Notovitch's famous forgery, of 1894, still treated by some writers as a true record, called *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, and Levi's psychic and sententious "transcription from the Akashic Records", of 1908, called *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*.

2. A. Faber-Kaiser, in *Jesus Died in Kashmir*, claims that Moses is buried on Mt. Niltoop near Bandipur, Kashmir, Jesus in the Rozabal in Srinagar, Mary in Murree, Pakistan, and that Thomas was cremated in Mylapore.

The first objective of these stories is to vilify Brahmins and malign the Hindu religion and community. The second objective — and here we part company with the Jesus story — is to present Christianity as an indigenous Indian religion, not a Western import, that can rightly claim religious hegemony in India.

The Syrian Church does not press the issue, but the Roman Church does claim India as part of her apostolic patrimony on the grounds that St. Thomas may have died here. The disclaimer “may” must be noted for the Church does not officially declare that St. Thomas ever came to India.

The third reason for the legend to exist is to help the community-conscious Syrian Christians maintain their caste identity. They claim to be Jews or Brahmins, the latter descendants of Namboodiris converted by St. Thomas in the first century C.E. — though there were in fact no Christians in India before the fourth century and when they did arrive and settle in Kerala, they would obtain a social position similar to that of Nairs.

The first St. Thomas story was invented to give these Syrian immigrants Indian ancestry and the patronage of a local martyr-saint — Christianity is the religion of martyrs<sup>3</sup> — and it was resurrected and embellished in the sixteenth century by Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who needed a pious story of persecution to cover up their own persecution of the Hindus. This is another reason for the Church to promote the story in Madras, for during that period she and her imperial Portuguese “secular

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3. Gore Vidal, in *Julian*, describes the vicious attacks made on Emperor Julian “the Apostate” by Christian bishops because he refused to give them martyrs. He had rejected Christianity as a false religion and returned to classical Paganism, but he continued to treat Christians with tolerance. He debated with them and made them pay reparations for the temples they had destroyed in the Roman Empire. He was assassinated by a trusted Christian officer while on campaign against the Persians. The story that his last words were “Thou hast conquered, Nazarene!” is a later Christian invention. Julian is still revered by those Europeans who realise that Christianity destroyed a superior Greek and Roman civilization and took Europe into the Dark Ages.

arm" destroyed many temples in Mylapore and its environs.

The Archaeological Survey of India has never investigated the origins of early Christian churches in India in the same way that it has studied old mosques and other Muslim monuments, but this work has been done by German scholars and awaits translation and publication in English. It shows that most sixteenth and seventeenth century churches in India contain temple rubble and are built on temple sites. The destruction of one of these temples, the ancient first Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore beach, is reviewed here because of its inexorable link with the legend of St. Thomas.

The famous English historian Arnold Toynbee observed that the mission and death of St. Thomas in India was probably legendary but that his reputed burial place in Mylapore was a centre of pilgrimage for Indian Christians. We observe that this reputed burial place of St. Thomas must now become a centre of pilgrimage for archaeologists, historians and philosophers who do not have a theological axe to grind like the pilgrims of old and the priests of today, but who would know the plain truth about old Mylapore and record it for our children.<sup>4</sup>

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4. This introduction was originally published in the first edition of this book and has been edited and abridged for this edition. We have carefully kept the last line intact as it has been so much "appreciated" by the editors of *The Hindu* and *Indian Express*. They have published articles promoting the St. Thomas fable on their children's pages after reading it. We suggest that they now approach Dr. R. Nagaswamy, eminent San Thome archaeologist, for more articles on the same subject. He has promised to write a new introduction for this book but has so far not been able to do it. A copy of our original manuscript remains with him.

*It has served us well, this myth of Christ.*

— Pope Leo X

In the beginning of *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, Roman Catholic hagiographer Donald Attwater writes, "Research into the lives of the earlier saints is beset with special difficulties. There are those which face other historians and biographers: fewness of records, their unreliability, uncertainties and contradictions, conflicting interpretations, and so on. But there are added to these, in particular, the 'selectiveness' of the material available and, not infrequently, what by later standards seems the unscrupulosity and absurd credulousness of many writers of the past. Most hagiographers were interested in nothing but the directly religious aspects of their subjects' lives: at the worst, a 'biography' became no more than a list of miracles, often puerile, or of voluntary physical austerities, or, in the case of a martyr, of repeated torments a single one of which no human body could survive, Or again, when material was lacking, the earlier hagiographer sometimes did not disdain to manufacture it himself or to borrow it: so that we may even come upon two saints whose written lives are almost word for word the same, with only names and places different. A high degree of authenticity and historical interest is a rather rare element in the huge whole of earlier hagiographical literature; instead we find myth, folklore, legend, and romantic and 'edifying' fiction."

A prime example of this kind of mythmaking — besides the Jesus story itself — was the identification and validation of St. Peter's

tomb in Rome, said to be situated under the high altar of Christendom's most famous church. In fact the tomb is not there, or to put it more politely, unverified by expert and disinterested parties as belonging to St. Peter or any other early Christian saint. Attwater says that the excavations are "impressive and of profound interest, but not wholly conclusive on this point." But the world's leading authority on Roman Catholic affairs, Avro Manhattan, in *The Vatican Billions*, writes, "The most fabulous [story] was undoubtedly that promoted by the cult of the Blessed Peter, the Turnkey of Heaven. The cult demanded a journey to Rome where Peter's tomb lay.

"Peter had been crucified there, it was asserted with no more plausible data than a pious tradition, for the bishops of Rome had no more evidence then than the pontiffs of the twentieth century. The latter have tried to substantiate it with doubtful archaeological finds. The process begun by Pope Pius XII [in 1939] was completed by Pope Paul VI. In 1968 Paul declared officially that 'a few fragments of human bones found under the Basilica of St. Peter are the authentic mortal remains of the Apostle'.

"How the 'identification' had been carried out, on a site where hundreds of thousands of bodies have been buried during many centuries,<sup>1</sup> was never plausibly explained, in view also of the fact that there has never been any definite historical evidence to prove that Peter was ever in Rome. The Roman bishops, however, cultivated the myth with undiminished eagerness. This they did not as mere upholders of a devout legend, but as the skillful promoters of a growing cult which had concrete and far-reaching objectives, since its magnification brought them immense authority

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1. St. Peter's Basilica, begun in 326 C.E. by Emperor Constantine over a small Pagan shrine, was built outside the walls of Rome on Vatican Hill, on an extensive and elaborate necropolis or "city of the dead". This consisted of a number of pre-Christian cemeteries used at different times over a long period. Rupert Furneau, in *The Other Side of the Story*, says that this complex was also the site of a cave-shrine for Mithra, the Persian deity whose popular cult was the chief rival of early Christianity.

and with it, money."

The revelation that the tomb of St. Peter is a fake will not come as a surprise to Europeans. They know better than anyone else the deceitful nature of the Roman Church. But the same revelation about the tomb of St. Thomas in Madras will come as a surprise to Indians. They know the story of St. Thomas in India because it has been repeated by interested persons of eminence and enterprise, and sometimes even of scholarship, since the sixteenth century. They accept it "on authority" and seem not to have found reason to doubt it — be they informed secular intellectuals or Dalit Christian converts. They have been put to sleep by its seemingly pious nature and so do not realise its implications. And they have been confounded by the fact that the legend is old and very complicated and keeps changing shape with each new rendition. It does not have any relevance to modern life, but it is still part of Indian Christian mythology and its unreformed mediaeval mind-set.

Now, we are going to try to unravel the St. Thomas legend as it is known in India, but before beginning at the beginning, with the *Acts of Thomas* itself, we must take a brief look at what Christian apologists say for the story they are so eager to sell to the professors and politicians — the newspapers have already bought it; it is a good stick to beat Hindus with, as will soon enough be seen.

For example, the Protestant missionary Claudius Buchanan, writing in the last century, in *Christian Researches in India*, says, "The nation in general are called St. Thomas Christians in all parts of India, and it imparts an antiquity that reaches far beyond the Eutychians and Nestorians<sup>2</sup> or any other sect.... I am satisfied that we have as good authority for believing that the

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2. Two fifth century Christian sects that were centred in Syria and Persia. The Eutychians believed that the human nature of Jesus was subsumed by his divine nature, and the Nestorians believed that the divine nature of Jesus was independent of his human nature but jointed to it in a kind of moral union.



Apostle Thomas died in India as that the Apostle Peter died in Rome."

This "good authority" is of course no authority at all. There is no historical evidence that St. Peter died in Rome or that St. Thomas died in India. The assertion that the appellation "St. Thomas" Christians is used in all parts of India and imparts an antiquity, is simply not true. Syrian Christians were not called St. Thomas Christians until after the fourteenth century and that too by Roman Catholic missionaries in Malabar. Claudius Buchanan could as easily argue that Syrian Christians come from Syria because they are called "Syrian" Christians. He would be closer to the truth.

Next, the Roman Catholic historian Fr. A. Mathias Mundadan, writing in the early 1980s, in *History of Christianity in India: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*, says, "Our effort should be to concentrate on the common, basic content of the tradition upheld by the various versions and couched in many unnecessary flourishes. The investigations made ... into the western tradition and different aspects of the Indian tradition give me the impression that the central content stands out in clear relief, namely St. Thomas the Apostle preached, died and was buried in South India."

Fr. Mundadan is saying that he supports the Portuguese tale introduced into India in the sixteenth century and imposed on Mylapore by fraud and force of arms, even though it is known to be a fabricated tradition. This suggests that his position is political rather than academic. He has done his research with a foregone conclusion in mind and has reached the inevitable result. It is typical Roman Catholic scholarship and until the story of St. Thomas is taken out of such hands and looked at in its totality, which includes the traditions of the Hindu society in which it survives, we will never know the full truth of St. Thomas and India.

Fr. Mundadan's work is important to note, but for different

reasons than he and his sponsors would like us to note it. He has had access to the best research facilities and materials that money can buy, and to professional assistance and encouragement that other scholars in India cannot hope to obtain, yet he has not been able to produce any proof or concrete historical evidence that St. Thomas came to India.

Fr. Mundadan has expressed his considered opinion that the Indian Christian tradition is true. Will he dare to consider the Hindu tradition too? Will he look at the material and literary evidence, and the most ancient living Hindu tradition, that a great Shiva temple once stood on the very site that he would have St. Thomas buried?

There is yet more reasoning for St. Thomas in India, which is often presented to laymen by motivated clerics. It is a psychological device to put the unwary St. Thomas doubter on the defensive. It is called the "Why not?" argument. Duncan Forbes uses it in his book *The Heart of India*, more in an attempt to convince himself than his reader. He writes, "And why not believe?... There is really no reason why St. Thomas should not have come here. The route between the Roman world and India, which was Rome's source for large quantities of fine muslins, pearls and spices, was well established."

The route between Rome and India was indeed old and established and the travellers went the other way too, to Alexandria and Rome from India. But the possibility that St. Thomas could come to India from Palestine does not prove that he did so. The possibility does not even make for a probability. We are looking for historical proof — travellers' tales just don't constitute proof; they only excite the imagination.

The "Why not?" question does not have an answer of course. It is only a proposition — and it is for the St. Thomas protagonists to prove the proposition and not pretend that it stands proved until somebody comes along and disproves it. Duncan Forbes, like most western Christians, does not believe the

St. Thomas legend himself. He is a travel writer and repeats the story in his book because it is entertaining. He gives himself away with the chapter headings. The chapter on St. Thomas is called "Doubting Thomas" and the chapter on St. Francis Xavier is called "The Apostle of the Indies".

Lastly, we look at a diverting mantological novel that passes itself off as serious historical research, the *Acta Indica* by P.V. Mathew. It has everything in it to make a good night's read — exploding meteors over Malabar and Prophet Mani of Persia camping at Kanchipuram — but it doesn't have St. Thomas buried in Mylapore. P.V. Mathew believes that St. Thomas came to Malabar but not to Mylapore and asserts that the Mylapore story is a Portuguese invention. Not willing to leave well enough alone, he then asserts that Prophet Mani's disciple Mar Ammon is buried in Mylapore instead. This Mar Ammon, according to P.V. Mathew, is now worshipped in Tamil villages as Goddess Mariamman, that Prophet Mani is worshipped in the same villages as God Subramanian, and that the Pallavas were really Persians.

All of this will interest those who like to play etymological games with ancient names, secretly wish they were born in foreign, and still subscribe to the discredited Aryan invasion theory. P.V. Mathew belongs to the school that says there is nothing Hindu in Hindustan or Indian in India — nothing good anyway. It is an old missionary school and its thinking still dominates some of our most prestigious institutions.

But the real problem with the *Acta Indica* for the student of history is its supernatural origins. P.V. Mathew writes, "I am indebted to St. Thomas the glorious Apostle of India, who sanctified me with revealed knowledge; and Moran Sabarisho, the Saint of St. Thomas Christians (pre-Portuguese period) for granting me the wisdom to understand the revealed knowledge and record it as such in this book."

P.V. Mathew's admission of having suffered a divine revelation

is detrimental to the Roman Catholic cause, though it is in keeping with its prophetic and weird traditions. It undermines whatever authority Christian scholars have been able to garner for their mundane St. Thomas dissertations. It also confirms Dr. A. Mingana's view, in *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, that, "What India gives us about Christianity in its midst is indeed nothing but pure fables."

At the same time, we, too, must make a confession. We have meditated on St. Thomas for years in a sincere attempt to discover the truth about his alleged sojourn in India. He has not responded to our prayers. We have had to do all the work ourselves, with the help of human friends, and we have had to start at the very beginning with the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*.<sup>3</sup> This lugubrious and turgid religious story by Bardesanes of Edessa is not included in Christian bibles<sup>4</sup> — not even Syrian or "St. Thomas" Christian bibles — although it is the only early ancient text to identify St. Thomas with India.

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3. The Apocrypha (Greek for "hidden things") are Jewish and Christian religious writings that have been excluded from the canon of the *Bible* because their content is considered counterfeit, fictitious, spurious, false, imitative, or contrary to Christian teaching.

4. The traditional dates and authors of all the *New Testament* books, whether they are accepted in the canon or not, are pure conjecture as there are no extant early manuscript versions predating the fourth century C.E. (Common Era). Emperor Diocletian destroyed all Christian writings in 303 C.E., and in 326 C.E., a year after the Council of Nicea raised Jesus from the position of mortal prophet to that of immortal God by an ecclesiastical vote of 218 for, 2 against (the bishops who said nay were from Libya), Emperor Constantine sanctioned the confiscation and destruction of all works that challenged "orthodox" Christian teaching. Five years later Constantine commissioned and financed new copies of the *Bible*, and as there were no longer any original documents to work from, the bishops, intent on promoting the Pauline salvation cult in their own interest, were free to revise, edit and rewrite the *Bible* in accordance with their own tenets. Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, show that the *Bible*, and accepted Christian tradition, is an arbitrary collection of borrowed and often fabulous tales, the historical truth of which has never been established by the best biblical scholars.

## 2

Bardesanes, the traditional author of the *Acts of Thomas*, was born at Edessa in Syria (now Urfa in Turkey) in 154 C.E., and died there, after a short exile in Armenia, in 233 C.E. His parents were wealthy aristocrats and he was brought up with a prince, Bar-Manu, who later succeeded to the throne of the Abgars. He married and had a son, Harmonius, who was a skilled musician and poet. He wrote in Greek and Syriac, the latter tongue a widely-spoken Aramaic dialect that was the Christian literary and liturgical language of Edessa up to the seventh century, when it was supplanted by Arabic.

Bardesanes was converted to Gnosticism, or Christian theosophy, in 179 C.E., and he persuaded his friend the prince to convert with him. He thus had a hand in creating the first Christian state, though it is said that St. Thomas had already visited the kingdom and a church had been established in it by his disciple Addai as early as 29 C.E. Whatever the truth of the early stories — such as the one about the Abgar writing a letter to Jesus asking for a cure — Edessa had become a chief centre of Christianity in West Asia by the end of the second century. This attracted the attention of Rome, as the state stood between Rome and her enemy Parthia, and Emperor Caracalla invaded Edessa and defeated the Abgar in 216 C.E. Bardesanes made a strong defence of Christianity before the Roman court, but subsequently left Edessa for a time and went to Armenia where he wrote a history based on the temple records of Ani. He wrote the *Acts of Thomas* at Edessa about 210 C.E., before the Roman invasion, and is remembered by Christian theosophists as an ardent

missionary and popular, charismatic religious leader.

G.R.S. Mead, in *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*, writes, "Bardesanes was also a great student of Indian religion, and wrote a book on the subject, from which the Platonist Prophyry subsequently quoted. But it is as a poet and writer on Christian theology and theosophy that Bardesanes gained so wide a reputation; he wrote many books in Syriac and also Greek ... [and] he was the first to adapt the Syriac tongue to metrical forms and set the words to music; these hymns became immensely popular, not only in the Edessene kingdom but wherever the Syriac tongue was spoken."

Bardesanes's faith was true after his master Valentinus, the founder of Gnostic schools in Alexandria and Rome, and orthodox Christians have cursed him bitterly for it. Ephraim of Edessa, a father of the Church, writing 120 years after his death, says that he died "with the Lord in his mouth and demons in his heart". He accused Bardesanes of being a heretic and sophist, a greedy sheep-dog in league with the wolves, and a cunning dissembler practicing deceit with his songs. If this is what a Christian saint has to say about his theology, it is something of an irony that Roman Catholic scholars are so eager to accept his geography.

It may have been reasonable for Bardesanes to set the protagonist of his Gnostic romance, Didymus Judas Thomas, in India, as he was a student of Indian philosophy. But it is really not known what he meant by this geographical designation, as we will see, and except for the Persian names — or their Greek equivalent if it is a Greek version of the *Acts* — the idiom and atmosphere of the book are entirely West Asian with Roman cultural overtones (like having the characters lie at table to eat and drink).

It is also not known whether Bardesanes wrote the story in Greek or Syriac. Hans Jones, in *The Gnostic Religion*, argues

that the *Acts*, a "Gnostic composition with orthodox reworkings", was originally written in Syriac. But Montague Rhodes James, the translator of the Oxford edition of *The Apocryphal New Testament*, believed that it was first written in Greek and soon afterward translated into Syriac. He says, "This is the only one of the five primary romances which we possess in its entirety. It is of great length and considerable interest."

Indeed, the text runs to 74 printed pages. We begin a summary of it with Mead, who writes, "The Apostle Judas Thomas, or the Twin of Jesus,<sup>5</sup> is fabled to have received India by lot for his apostolic sphere of work. Thomas at first does not wish to go, but is sold by Jesus his master, to a trader from the East as a slave skilled in carpentry."

We now continue the narrative with James, quoting at length his translation of the *Acts* from the Greek. It begins abruptly, without saying where Thomas is or how he got there, except for the indefinite geographical designation "India".

Judas Thomas and the merchant trader Abbanes arrive by ship at a royal city called Andropolis. They disembark, "and lo, there were noises of flutes and water-organs ... for the king hath an only daughter, and now he giveth her in marriage unto a husband ... and Abbanes hearing that, said to the apostle: Let us go [to the marriage feast], lest we offend the king, especially seeing we are strangers. And he said: Let us go ...

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5. The sobriquets "Didymus" and "Thomas", the first Greek and the second Aramaic, indicate that Judas was the natural born twin brother of Jesus. Rupert Furneau, in *The Other Side of the Story*, writes, "The legend of the strong resemblance which existed between Jesus and Thomas would not have been invented by the Christians as it could have been used in explanation of the resurrection story.... It is seldom realized that Jesus had a number of brothers and sisters. Paul states that he was the first born of many brethren. By Mark and Luke four brothers are named, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. There were probably two other brothers and at least two sisters. Christian tradition, in order to confirm the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary, has tried to turn them into cousins, or alternatively to make them into half-brothers, sons of Joseph by a previous wife."

"And after they had put up in the inn and rested a little space they went to the marriage; and the apostle seeing them all reclining, laid himself, he also, in the midst ... but Abbanes the merchant, being the master, laid himself in another place.

"And as they dined and drank, the apostle tasted nothing; so that they that were about him said unto him: Wherefore art thou come here, neither eating nor drinking? but he answered them, saying: I am come here for somewhat greater than the food or the drink, and that I may fulfil the king's will, and whoso hearkeneth not to the heralds shall be subject to the king's judgement.

"So when they had dined and drunken, and garlands and unguents were brought to them, every man took of the unguent, and one anointed his face and another his beard and another other parts of his body; but the apostle anointed the top of his head and smeared a little upon his nostrils, and dropped it into his ears and touched his teeth with it, and carefully anointed the parts about his heart: and the wreath that was brought to him, woven of myrtle and other flowers, he took, and set it on his head, and took a branch of calamus and held it in his hand.

"Now the flute-girl ... went about to them all and played, but when she came to the place where the apostle was, she stood over him and played at his head for a long space: now this flute-girl was by race a Hebrew.

"And as the apostle continued looking at the ground, one of the cup-bearers stretched forth his hand and gave him a buffet; and the apostle lifted up his eyes and looked upon him that smote him and said: My God will forgive thee in the life to come this iniquity, but in this world thou shalt show forth his wonders, and even now shall I behold this hand that hath smitten me dragged by dogs. And having said so, he began to sing..."

Sometime later, the apostle's curse takes effect, and "the cup-bearer that had buffeted him went down to the well to draw water; and there chanced to be a lion there, and it slew him and



left him lying in that place, having torn his limbs in pieces, and forthwith dogs seized his members, and among them one black dog holding his right hand in his mouth bare it into the place of the banquet."

This is how the *Acts of Thomas* begins.

The story continues, when the king, hearing of the apostle's powers, comes and asks him to pray for his daughter and her new husband. Judas Thomas agrees, and laying hands on the newly wedded couple, he prays to Jesus, and then leaves them and that place and departs.

Now the king asks for the room to be cleared, so that the couple may be left alone, "and when all were gone out and the doors were shut, the bridegroom lifted up the curtain of the bride-chamber to fetch the bride unto him. And he saw the Lord Jesus bearing the likeness of Judas Thomas and speaking with the bride — even of him that but now had blessed them and gone out from them, the apostle; and he saith unto him: Wentest thou not out in the sight of all? how then art thou found here? But the Lord said to him: I am not Judas which is also called Thomas, but I am his brother. And the Lord sat down upon the bed and bade them also sit upon chairs, and began to say unto them:

"Remember, my children, what my brother spake unto you and what he delivered before you: and know this, that if ye abstain from this foul intercourse ..."

The royal couple are persuaded to abstain, and are converted by Jesus, and are chaste and do not consummate their marriage, and "when the king heard these things from the bridegroom and the bride, he rent his clothes and said unto them that stood by him: Go forth quickly ... and take and bring me that man that is a sorcerer who by ill fortune came unto this city; for with mine own hands I brought him into this house, and I told him to pray over this mine ill-starred daughter; and whoso findeth and bringeth him to me, I will give him whatever he asketh of me."

But Judas Thomas was not to be found, for he had fled that place, and was come into the cities of India.

"Now when the apostle was come into the cities of India with Abbanes the merchant, Abbanes went to salute the king Gundaphorus,<sup>6</sup> and reported to him of the carpenter whom he had brought with him. And the king was glad ... and the king said: Canst thou build me a palace? And he answered: Yea, I can both build and furnish it; for to this end am I come, to build and to do the work of a carpenter."

Gundaphorus then takes Judas Thomas outside the city, to a wet, woody place where he desires the palace to be built. The apostle draws him an elaborate plan on the ground with a reed, and the king, being pleased, says: "Verily thou art a craftsman, and it befitteth thee to be a servant of kings. And he left much money with him and departed from him."

Sometime later, the king sends more money and provisions to the apostle, whom he trusts as a good servant; but he, deceiving him, and not doing any work, goes about the countryside distributing the gold and silver as alms to the poor.

"After these things the king sent an ambassador unto the apostle, and wrote thus: Signify unto me what thou hast done, or what I shall send thee, or of what thou hast need. And the apostle sent unto him, saying: The palace is builded and only the roof remaineth. And the king hearing it sent him again gold and silver, and wrote unto him: Let it be roofed, if it is done."

Now Gundaphorus comes on a tour to the city and inquires of his friends about the palace that Judas Thomas is building for

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6. This king is the only character in the *Acts* (besides Judas Thomas) who can perchance be identified with a historical person. Some say he is the same as Gondophernes or Guduphara, the Indo-Parthian king who ruled over Arachosia, Kabul, and Gandhara (modern Afghanistan and Pakistan) from about 19 to 45 C.E. (the dates are disputed). The *Acts* gives no vital information about him, his reign, his city, or his country except to say that it is in "India". He can be identified as Parthian from his name, the original Persian form of it being Vindapharna.

him, and they say to him: "Neither hath he built a palace nor done aught else of that he promised to perform, but he goeth about the cities and countries, and whatsoever he hath he giveth unto the poor, and teacheth of a new God, and healeth the sick, and driveth out devils, and doeth many other wonderful things; and we think him to be a sorcerer.... And when the king heard that, he rubbed his face with his hands, and shook his head for a long space."

The king then sends for the merchant Abbanes and Judas Thomas, and says to the apostle: "Hast thou built me the palace? And he said: Yea. and the king said: When, then, shall we go and see it? But he answered him and said: Thou canst not see it now, but when thou departest this life, then thou shalt see it. And the king was exceedingly wroth, and commanded both the merchant and Judas which is called Thomas to be put in bonds and cast into prison until he should inquire and learn unto whom the king's money had been given, and so destroy both him and the merchant."

Judas Thomas and the trader Abbanes are taken away to prison, and that night the king's brother Gad falls ill, and sends for the king and says: "O king my brother, I commit unto thee mine house and my children; for I am vexed by reason of the provocation that hath befallen thee, and lo, I die ... and as they talked together, the soul of his brother Gad departed."

And angels take the soul of the king's brother up into heaven, and they ask him: "In which place wouldst thou dwell? And when they drew near unto the building of Thomas the apostle which he had built for the king, Gad saw it and said unto the angels: I beseech you, my lords, suffer me to dwell in one of the lowest rooms of these. And they said to him: Thou canst not dwell in this building.... This is that palace which that Christian builded for thy brother. And he said: I beseech you, my lords, suffer me to go to my brother, that I may buy this palace of him;

for my brother knoweth not of what sort it is, and he will sell it unto me."

And Gad returns to life, and the king is informed. He comes and stands by his brother's bed, amazed, and unable to speak, and Gad says to him: "Sell me that palace which thou hast in the heavens? And the king said: Whence should I have a palace in the heavens? And he said: Even that which the Christian built for thee which is now in the prison, whom the merchant brought unto thee, having purchased him of one Jesus: I mean that Hebrew slave whom thou desireth to punish as having suffered deceit at his hand: wherest I was grieved and died, and am now revived."

But the king having learned of the palace in heaven from his brother Gad, wants to keep it, and refuses to sell it; he says they must go to the apostle and ask his forgiveness, and ask him to build another palace in heaven. The brothers go to the prison, and Judas Thomas agrees to build another palace in heaven for Gad; and the king and his brother are converted, and baptized in the public baths, and chrismed, and the apostle prays:

"Come, thou power of the Most High, and the compassion that is perfect.

"Come, gift of the Most High.

"Come, compassionate mother.

"Come, communion of the male.

"Come, she that revealeth the hidden mysteries.

"Come, mother of the seven houses, that thy rest may be in the eighth house.

"Come, elder of the five members, mind, thought, reflection, consideration, reason; communicate with these young men.

"Come, holy spirit, and cleanse their reins and their heart, and give them the added seal, in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Ghost."

This prayer is a Manichaeian invocation of a feminine Holy

Spirit, according to Prof. F.C. Burkitt in a note in the Oxford edition of the *Acts of Thomas* that we are following, though it has been bowdlerized by the translator in favour of conventional Christian phraseology. The story itself is Syro-Persian, set in some corner of the Parthian Empire, as indicated by the style of living and cultural ambience. It is not Indian, not even North-West Indian. A summary of its central part follows.

Judas Thomas, having accomplished the conversion of Gundaphorus and Gad, is directed by Jesus in a dream to leave the city. He goes out, having given up the pretense of being a carpenter, and soon after comes upon a beautiful youth lying dead by the wayside. He prays over the boy, and is immediately challenged by the dragon who has slain him. The dragon calls himself Satan — and says too that he is the Great Satan. But in the contest that follows he is defeated by the apostle and compelled to suck out the poison that has killed the youth. This causes him to burst and die, but not before he gives a long speech on fornication, of which the youth is accused. The youth revives, confesses his sins before the multitude, and Judas Thomas continues on his way. He heals the sick, raises the dead, and preaches an uncompromising doctrine of sexual continence. His sole theme is that a Christian must be chaste, even within the sacrament of marriage.

This teaching is not welcomed in the cities and towns that he visits, but the people are attracted by his bizarre and violent miracles. Some are converted, anointed with oil, and put into the care of a priest. He then moves to new cities and districts, heals the sick, raises the dead, and drives devils out of women. He hears the confession of a talking donkey who admits that he was a priest of Balaam before he turned to Jesus.

But the apostle's special field of work are women and virgins. He entices them away from their families, converts them, puts them into sackcloth and ashes, and locks them up behind

doors. This causes great discord in the cities and earns him the bitter enmity of the husbands and brothers of those he has bewitched with his words.

He is finally brought before the king, Misdaeus,<sup>7</sup> and asked about his activities. The king says: "Wherefore teachest thou this new doctrine, which both Gods and men hate, and which has nought of profit? And Judas said: What evil do I teach? And Misdaeus said: Thou teachest, saying that men cannot live well except that they live chastely with the God whom thou preachest. Judas saith: Thou sayest true, O king: thus do I teach."

Now the time of the apostle's death draws near. The story is given in full here so that the reader will have a reference with which to compare the tales that are told in Malabar and Mylapore. This is the original story, from which all other versions derive. It tells of a legitimate execution for wicked deeds, by a king who has been severely provoked by a sorcerer — though it has a posthumous royal conversion and is couched in much unctuous verbiage.

Judas Thomas ignores the king's warning. He converts the prince of the house, Iuzanes, and his mother the queen. The other women of the court have already left to follow the new creed. The city is in turmoil, and the deserted king is appalled by the events around him. He has the apostle arrested, and confronts him. He asks: "Art thou bond or free? Thomas said: I am the bondsman of one only, over whom thou hast no authority. And Misdaeus saith to him: How didst thou run away and come into this country? And Thomas said: I was sold hither by my master, that I may save many, and by thy hand depart out of this world....

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7. This king is better known by his Persian name, Mazdai, which is found in the Syriac version of the *Acts* (Misdaeus is Greek). It specifically denotes a Zoroastrian ruler. He has no known historical counterpart and the *Acts* gives no vital information about him except to say that he rules in "a desert country". Some Catholic writers try to make him into a first century king of Mylapore, but the *Acts* does not support so far-fetched a proposition.

And Misdaeus saith unto him: I have not made haste to destroy thee, but have had long patience with thee: but thou has added unto thine evil deeds, and thy sorceries are dispersed abroad and heard of throughout all this country: but this I do that thy sorceries may depart with thee, and our land be cleansed from them."

But the apostle again rejects the king's plea to reform, and so "Misdaeus considered how he should put him to death; for he was afraid because of the many people who were subject unto him, for many also of the nobles and of them that were in authority believed on him. He took him therefore and went out of the city; and armed soldiers went with him. And the people supposed that the king desired to learn somewhat of him, and they stood still and gave heed. And when they had walked one mile, he delivered him unto four soldiers and an officer, and commanded them to take him into the mountain and there pierce him with spears and put an end to him, and return again to the city. And saying thus unto the soldiers, he himself also returned unto the city.

"But the men ran after Thomas, desiring to deliver him from death. And two soldiers went on the right hand of the apostle and two on his left, holding spears, and the officer held his hand and supported him.... And being come up into the mountain unto the place where he was to be slain, he said unto them that held him, and to the rest: Brethren, hearken unto me now at the last; for I am come to my departure out of the body. Let not then the eyes of your heart be blinded, nor your ears be made deaf. Believe on the God whom I preach, and be not guides unto yourselves in the hardness of your heart, but walk in all your liberty, and in the glory that is toward men, and the life that is toward God.

"And he said unto Iuzanes: Thou son of the earthly king Misdaeus and minister to the minister of our Lord Jesus Christ: give unto the servants of Misdaeus their price that they may suffer me to go and pray. And Iuzanes persuaded the soldiers to

let him pray. And the blessed Thomas went to pray, and kneeled down and rose up and stretched forth his hands unto heaven ... and when he had thus prayed he said unto the soldiers: Come hither and accomplish the commandments of him that sent you. And the four came and pierced him with their spears, and he fell down dead.

“And all the brethren wept; and they brought beautiful robes and much and fair linen, and buried him in a royal sepulchre wherein the former first kings were laid.”

But Siphor the priest and Iuzanes the king's son refuse to leave the apostle and continue to sit on the mountain. Thomas suddenly appears and orders them to go back to the city, as he is not there but has gone up to heaven. He promises that they will join him soon. So Siphor and Iuzanes go down from the mountain that held the sepulchre of ancient kings.

“Now it came to pass after a long time that one of the children of Misadeus the king was smitten by a devil, and no man could cure him, for the devil was exceedingly fierce. And Misdaeus the king took thought and said: I will go and open the sepulchre, and take a bone of the apostle of God and hang it upon my son, and he shall be healed ... and he went and opened the sepulchre, but found not the apostle there, for one of the brethren had stolen him away and taken him unto Mesopotamia; but from that place where the bones of the apostle had lain Misdaeus took dust and put it about his son's neck, saying: I believe on thee, Jesus Christ, now that he hath left me which troubleth men and opposeth them lest they should see thee. And when he had hung it upon his son, the lad became whole.

“Misdaeus the king therefore was also gathered among the brethren, and bowed his head under the hands of Siphor the priest; and Siphor said unto the brethren: Pray ye for Misdaeus the king, that he may obtain mercy of Jesus Christ, and that he may no longer remember evil against him. They all therefore,



with one accord rejoicing, made prayer for him ... and he was gathered with the multitude of them that had believed in Christ, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost; whose is power and adoration, now and for ever and world without end. Amen."

This is the essential *Acts of Thomas*, with the opening and closing acts quoted at length for reference. Fr. A. Mathias Mundadan, Professor of Church History and Theology at the Dharmaram Pontifical Institute, Bangalore, in *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I, says "The description of the place of St. Thomas's martyrdom [in the *Acts*] would easily suggest Mylapore as the town of king Mazdai [or Misdaeus]."

This statement is patently absurd in the face of the evidence of the *Acts* itself. Mylapore has never been "a desert country" as Mazdai's land is described in the *Acts* — his city is not described at all — and has never had a Zoroastrian king or a mountain with an ancient royal sepulchre in it. Mylapore has always been known as a Hindu pilgrimage town and busy port, with jasmine gardens, jungles, peacocks and lush coconut groves. Mundadan can get away with his motivated assertions because most students of the St. Thomas legend do not know the *Acts of Thomas* or the topography of Mylapore and its larger environs. They also do not know West Asia and Persia and the history of Christianity in these places and the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> They have no means by which to judge the declared conceits of Mundadan and the tribe of scholars that he represents. They must accept these conceits in good faith — and unfortunately their good faith is exploited to the limit.

There is simply nothing Indian, much less South Indian, in

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8. This writer has followed the various land routes between India and Europe and has travelled throughout West Asia. He has also studied the politics and history of early Christianity for many years.

the setting and ambience of the *Acts of Thomas*. All internal evidence suggests Syria, Iraq and Persia — or Parthia as it was called in the first century C.E. — as the place where the drama of the *Acts* was played out to its preordained end, or to a kingdom on the edge of the Roman Empire — like Edessa itself — as there are strong Greco-Roman influences in the text. India as a specific place and Gundaphorus and Misdaeus-Mazdai as Indian kings appear to be literary devices used by Bardesanes to give credibility to the unconventional religious theme of the book.

C.B. Firth, in *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, writes, "It is no uncommon thing to find [ancient writers] using [the name India] of countries such as Ethiopia, Arabia or Afghanistan. Indeed, except for those who had reason to be acquainted with our India, 'India' was a vague term which might stand for almost any religion beyond the Empire's southeastern frontiers.... To the fourth century Fathers India is the place of St. Thomas's labours; but others, of earlier date, say Parthia, that is the Persian Empire stretching from North-West India to Mesopotamia; and of these the most notable is Eusebius the historian, who wrote in the fourth century. He says, 'When the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered over all the world, Thomas, so the tradition has it, obtained as his portion Parthia...' Eusebius quotes as his authority for this statement the famous Alexandrian Father, Origen (ca. 185-254), thus carrying back the tradition to the first half of the third century. According to Origen and Eusebius, then, it was Parthia to which St. Thomas went. Moreover in another place Eusebius says that it was St. Bartholomew who went to India.... In what he says of St. Bartholomew Eusebius may well have in mind one of the countries bordering on the Red Sea."

C.B. Firth could have included the testimony of Origen's teacher, the Greek missionary theologian Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-235), who had travelled from Greece to Italy, Syria and

Palestine before settling in Egypt. Clement is known as an apologist rather than a father of the Church, as he tried to reconcile Platonic philosophy with Christian doctrine. He is the first orthodox Christian scholar to say that St. Thomas went to Parthia.

But before we continue with the fathers of the Church and their testimony for or against St. Thomas in India, reference must be made to another apocryphal Syrian text called the *Teaching of the Apostles*. It was written at Edessa by an unknown Arian author about 250 C.E. and deals with Christian ethics, the duties of priests, the eucharistic liturgy, rituals, and various other church problems. It says, "India and all its own countries, and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostle's Hand of the Priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was Guide and Ruler in the church which he built and ministered there."

Further on the *Teaching* names the lands that had priests ordained by Aggaeus the disciple of Addaeus (Addai) the disciple of Judas Thomas, as "the whole of Persia of the Assyrians and Medes, and the countries round about Babylon ... even to the borders of the Indians and even to the country of Gog and Magog.

In hoary British tradition, Gog and Magog are two giants of Cornwall who were slain by Brutus the Trojan, the legendary founder of London, but the author of the *Teaching* is probably referring to Prophet Ezekiel and the land of Magog from whence Gog would come, which lay somewhere to the north of Israel.

The *Teaching of the Apostles* is following the earlier *Acts of Thomas* when it says that St. Thomas evangelized India — by which it means Parthia from the evidence in the text itself — as it was written at Edessa too where the *Acts* was written, by a heterodox author who could have been a disciple of Bardesanes. He is a typical hagiographer, magnifying the works of St. Thomas and his disciples throughout the world — for this must be

the significance of the reference to the mythical land of Gog and Magog.

These two third century Syrian texts are the literary foundation on which the tradition of St. Thomas in India is built. Without them, and especially without the *Acts*, there is no St. Thomas east of Khorasan — the Land of the Rising Sun — which was the centre of the Parthian Empire and is the “India” of the *Acts*, even as “the farthest sea” of the *Teaching* is the Red and Arabian Seas that bordered the Parthian Empire.

Now to return to the fathers and doctors of the Church who testify to the coming of St. Thomas to India, the fourth century Ephraim of Edessa (the same who attacked Bardesanes), Gregory of Nazianzus,<sup>9</sup> Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, the fifth century Gaudentius of Brescia, Paulinus of Nola, the sixth century Gregory of Tours, the seventh century Isidore of Seville, and the eighth century Bede of Jarrow, are all quoting the *Acts*, or works and verbal traditions based on the *Acts*, or the authority of each other. Their testimony is worthless as history even if it is made in good faith.

The same could be said of the testimony of the second and third century Clement and Origen, and fourth century Eusebius, but the difference is that their earlier date and closeness to the alleged events and its first traditions — which are not recorded in a stylized religious fiction like the *Acts* — give them more credibility. They, too, had knowledge of the *Acts* and *Teaching* but chose to ignore them and declare that St. Thomas went to

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<sup>9</sup> About this Gregory, R.C. Majumdar, in *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, quoted by Sita Ram Goel in *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters*, writes, “According to the Syrian writer Zenob there was an Indian colony in the canton of Taron on the upper Euphrates, to the west of Lake Van, as early as the second century B.C. The Indians had built there two temples containing images of Gods about 18 and 22 feet high. When, about A.D. 304, St. Gregory came to destroy these images, he was strongly opposed by the Hindus. But he defeated them and smashed the images, thus anticipating the iconoclastic zeal of Mahmud of Ghazni.”

Parthia. Eusebius, who had done research at Edessa for his *Ecclesiastical History* but lived at Caesarea Maritima in Palestine, the port from which St. Thomas would have had to embark for India, certainly knew both traditions thoroughly and is a principal witness. Moreover he held unorthodox religious views and would have been sympathetic to the Christian theosophy expounded in the *Acts*. Yet he states that St. Thomas went from Jerusalem by land to proselytise the Parthians. This supports the tradition that St. Thomas went to Edessa to meet his disciple Addai, whom he had sent earlier to meet the Abgar — the same Edessa that would later honour him with a book, a mummy, a tomb, and a cult.

But Clement, Origen and Eusebius are not the only early Christian scholars to say that St. Thomas went to Parthia. There is also the fourth century priest, Rufinus of Aquileia, who translated Greek theological texts into Latin, and the fifth century Byzantine church historian and legal consultant, Socrates of Constantinople, who also wrote an *Ecclesiastical History* after Eusebius, the second edition which is still completely extant and considered an indispensable documentary source of early church history.

Both Rufinus and Socrates would have known the Greek version of the *Acts* which was made immediately after the Syriac text was written (if it wasn't the other way round as some scholars maintain). They would also have known the testimony of Ephraim, Gregory, Ambrose and Jerome for St. Thomas in India. Yet Rufinus and Socrates both declare that St. Thomas went to Parthia.

The reason that the testimony of the *Acts of Thomas* is rejected by Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Rufinus and Socrates is the same as that of modern scholars who reject it. The *Acts* is a purely fictional work without any historical authority, written specifically to promote the doctrine that a Christian must be

chaste even within the relationship of marriage. This opinion, held by some Gnostics and apparently by St. Thomas too, was presented to the Edessene public by Bardesanes in the form of an engaging miracle romance.<sup>10</sup> The story was deliberately set in India, a vast land to the east of Edessa from which all sort of peculiar religious theories emanated. Bardesanes was a theologian not a geographer, and the latter discipline was made to serve the former — just as it is made to do today by interested Catholic scholars.

The reasonable view held by many scholars today, that nobody in third century Asia was interested in St. Thomas except Edessa, where his cult was centred and from where it radiated, was anticipated by Dr. G. Milne Rae at the end of the last century.

Milne Rae was a professor at Madras Christian College and wrote a book, *The Syrian Church in India*, which provoked severe criticism from the Syrian Christian community. In it he denies the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas, and in another research paper asks, "In what literature is the name of St. Thomas first associated with India? It will appear I think the home of that literature, the original hothead in which it was reared, was no other than the Church of Edessa. For there is no place within the area occupied, by the language in which those books were written, that had any such interest in the fortunes and destiny of the Apostle. The story of Thomas preaching and his martyrdom in India is first found in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* and it is curious to note that throughout the work the Apostle is generally called Judas Thomas, a name which he also received in that

10. Robert M. Grant, Professor of Humanities and Early Christian History at the University of Chicago and author of *Historical Introduction to the New Testament* and *Early Christianity and Society*, writes, "The various acts, close in form and content to the contemporary Hellenistic romances, turned the apostolic drama into melodrama and satisfied the popular taste for stories of travel and adventure, as well as for a kind of asceticism generally rejected by Christian leaders."

group of documents which Eusebius found among the archives at Edessa. It is palpably a Gnostic work and students of Gnosticism, judging from the stages of development at which they find the heresy in the *Acts*, assign it to the end of the second century. It may have been written by Bardesanes. But whoever the real author was, I think the details of this work are not only consistent with the belief that they were put together by a member of the Edessene Church, but also defy explanation on any other hypothesis."

Donald Attwater, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*, with reference to L.W. Brown in *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, writes, "There is endless discussion about St. Thomas's subsequent life. In particular, did he take the gospel to India, where for many centuries the Christians of Kerala have called themselves 'St. Thomas Christians'? That he did so, and was martyred there, is the theme of a long document of the third or fourth century, called the *Acts of Thomas*. This is one of the most readable and intrinsically interesting of early Christian apocryphal writings; but it is no more than a popular romance, written in the interest of false Gnostic teachings (e.g. the virtual necessity of celibacy for Christians). It is not impossible that St. Thomas should have reached southern India, but the historical reality of his mission there cannot be considered proved. It is also said that he evangelized Parthia, and in the fourth century his relics were claimed to be at Edessa in Mesopotamia."

As for the testimony of the early fathers Ephraim, Gregory, Ambrose and Jerome, M. Augustus Neander, in *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, writes, "The writings of the so-called apostolic fathers have unhappily for the most part come down to us in a condition very little worthy of confidence. At a very early date spurious writings were planned in the names of these men so highly venerated in the church for the purpose of giving authority to particular opinions or principles."



Augustus Neander is being generous to the fathers of the Church. Herbert Cutner, in *Jesus: God, Man or Myth?*, accuses them directly of being credulous. He writes, "If the crass superstition of that parcel of fools, the Apostolic Fathers, and the idiotic 'details' put in the various apocryphal [Acts and] Gospels do not in themselves put these 'authorities' out of court, then I'm afraid no argument ever discovered could do so."

In a sense this is the last word, for the *Acts of Thomas* does by its own internal "details" destroy the history that it is said to record, and the testimony of the fathers, with few exceptions, is disproved by their mindless pronouncements on what they wish to confirm. Their "evidence" is never anything more than a pious testimony based on personal faith and opinion that was highly coloured by the political and theological pressures of the day. Their "authority" has been exploited down the ages and is a precursor of the modern Catholic superstition of papal infallibility.<sup>11</sup>

Judge C.B. Waite, in *History of the Christian Religion to the Year Two Hundred*, carefully reviewed all the available early documents of the Church. His impartial criticism of them caused many scholars to conclude that Church history of the first two centuries is based on myth and invention. S.J. Case, in *The*

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11. This dogma of self-aggrandizement was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1870. It is in keeping with the Semitic tradition of making extravagant claims to establish personal authority. Jehovah claimed to be the only God and Jesus claimed to be the only Son of God. Next came the martyrs, confessors, fathers and saints with their claims of authority. The Roman bishops claimed to be the only vicars of God on earth and became popes. Pope Hadrian I claimed in a famous forgery, the Donation of Constantine, ca. 774, to be above kings and nations and the "legal" heir to the Roman emperors. Pope Alexander VI claimed in 1493 to have dominion over the whole earth including those parts of it that he did not know about. Pope Pius IX's claim is a logical progression of this manic scheme to take over the world (which originated with Moses and was perfected by Mohammed). It is an attempt by modern popes to establish their "only" moral and spiritual authority in a world that has so far denied them absolute powers.

*Historicity of Jesus*, while defending the historicity of Jesus, admits that the apocryphal books are not true in their details. L. de la Vallee-Poussin, A. Harnack and Richard Garbe do not give the *Acts of Thomas* any credibility at all.

Jacques Basnage, the Protestant French minister and historiographer of the seventeenth century, rejected the tradition that St. Thomas came to India. So did the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical historian of the same period, Louis-Sebastien Le Nain de Tillemont, who provided a rigorous appraisal of early historical writing in his *Memoirs Useful for the Ecclesiastical History of the First Six Centuries*. The French Protestant La Croze in the eighteenth century and the English Protestants James Hough and Sir John Kaye in the nineteenth century, all historians of repute, also rejected the tradition.

The Jesuit Bolandist Peeters and Maurice Winternitz, Professor of Indian Philology and Ethnology at the German University of Prague, categorically deny that St. Thomas came to India. And the Indian "St. Thomas" Christian K.E. Job, a cautious voice among three archbishops, eleven bishops, and fifty-three priests who contributed to the *Mar Thoma Centenary Commemoration Volume 1952*, writes, "But there are few records enabling one to be positive about the scene of the activities of each of these Apostles [Peter and Paul] and how each of them carried out the commands of their Master ... [and] certain knowledge about the other Apostles [Thomas and Bartholomew]<sup>12</sup> is absolutely inadequate."

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12. The *New Testament* says almost nothing about St. Bartholomew, but an apocryphal story alleges that he founded a church at Kalyan, near Bombay, and left a Hebrew version of the *Gospel of Mathew* there. This book was later found by Pantaenus of Alexandria, who is said to have visited India in 190 C.E. All historians since Tillemont agree that Pantaenus went to Arabia Felix, which, like Ethiopia, was often referred to as "India" by ancient writers. C.B. Firth says that St. Bartholomew went to a country bordering on the Red Sea, and Donald Attwater says that there is no proof that he visited India, Lycaonia (Turkey), or even Armenia where he was supposed to have been flayed alive.

Dr. J.N. Farquhar, author of *The Apostle Thomas in North India* and *The Apostle Thomas in South India*, admits, "We can not prove that the story [of St. Thomas] is history."

Dr. A. Mingana, in *The Early Spread of Christianity in Asia and the Far East* and *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, adopts a non-committal attitude towards St. Thomas. We have quoted him as saying, "What India gives us about Christianity in its midst is indeed nothing but pure fables."

Professor Arnold Toynbee, in *A Study of History*, observes, "Though the Saint's mission and death in India are probably legendary, his reputed burial place was a centre of pilgrimage for Indian Christians."

Bishop Stephen Neill studied the St. Thomas legend carefully during his years in India, and lamented its spread among Indian Christians. He regarded the story as spurious history, and in *History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to 1707 A.D.*, writes, "A number of scholars, among whom are to be mentioned with respect Bishop A.E. Medleycott, J.N. Farquhar and the Jesuit J. Dahlman, have built on slender foundations what can only be called Thomas romances, such as reflect the vividness of their imaginations rather than the prudence of rigid historical critics."

Bishop Neill is being charitable to Bishop Medleycott when he calls his *India and the Apostle Thomas* an imaginative romance built on slender foundations. Henry Love, in *Vestiges of Old Madras*, is even more forgiving when he writes, "Bishop Medleycott, who has sifted every shred of evidence on the subject, concludes that St. Thomas the Apostle preached and suffered on the Mount, but his arguments do not appear to be altogether convincing."

Bishop Medleycott is the godfather of Thomas-in-India scholarship in India, and even in his day he was accused of working under religious, political, linguistic, regional and racial influences. He was the Vicar Apostolic of Trichur from 1887 to 1896, the diocese in which the alleged landing place of St. Thomas, Cranganore, is located, and was the first European missionary bishop to be appointed by Rome to rule over the local Syrian Christian community. This community existed in a forgotten Kerala backwater that was overshadowed by San Thome at Mylapore, and he had a mandate — or believed he had a mandate — to raise Cranganore's status and prepare the ideological ground for the apostle's "return".

Medleycott soon discovered that this was not very hard to do. The old tradition of St. Thomas was still alive in Malabar, in mediaeval Syrian wedding songs and "evidence" left behind by those pious forgers and pirates, the Portuguese, and he had local Syrian priests to advise him. There was also the *Acts of Thomas*, which nobody knew in the original and which no Christian priest would dare to teach to his congregation. All that was needed was

inventive Catholic scholarship to turn a local Syrian tradition into world history.

Medleycott won the day with his work, though he didn't live to see it. St. Thomas was "returned" to Cranganore — now Kodungallur — in 1953, in the form of a piece of bone from the elbow of his right arm. The relic was a gift from the clergy of Ortona, Italy, where the apostle's Church-authenticated remains had lain since 1258. They had been brought to Ortona from Edessa by way of Chios in Greece.

Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, the other imaginative writer of oriental church history, led the "second coming" to Cranganore, and he later proceeded to Mylapore with another bit of Ortona bone for the cathedral there. For the first time in history both sites in India associated with St. Thomas in legend and story could truly say that they possessed his relics.

This event and the alleged first century coming of the apostle were commemorated by the Government of India with postage stamps that were issued in 1964 and 1973. The first stamp depicts the silver bust of St. Thomas that is in the cathedral at Ortona, which contains his complete skull, and the second shows the Persian "St. Thomas" cross on St. Thomas Mount near Madras. That neither these artefacts nor the relics, or, for that matter, the legendary event that they celebrate, are Indian, is one of the ironies that is part of the history of the story of St. Thomas in India.

But Bishop Medleycott's victory went further. He got himself named as the St. Thomas authority in the prestigious *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Fifteenth Edition, 1984, along with Chevalier F.A. D'Cruz, editor of the old *Mylapore Catholic Register* and author of *St. Thomas the Apostle in India*.

The unsigned main entry for St. Thomas in the *Encyclopaedia* is muddled and dissembling and simply wrong in some places. After giving the *New Testament* references, it says,

“Thomas’ subsequent history is uncertain. According to the 4th-century *Ecclesiastical History* of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, he evangelized Parthia (modern Khorasan). Later Christian tradition says Thomas extended his apostolate into India, where he is recognised as the founder of the church of the Syrian Malabar Christians, or Christians of St. Thomas. In the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, originally composed in Syriac, his martyrdom is cited under the king of Mylapore at Madras ...”

The *Acts* does not “cite” this at all of course, as we have shown by direct quotation; it does not even remotely suggest it. There is no known record that Mylapore had a king in the first century and if it did, he was not a Zoroastrian with the name of Mazdai. The story in the *Acts* and the Mylapore legend have nothing in common, though the latter can be said to exist only because of the former. Further on the article says, “He allegedly visited the court of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophernes ... though some of the *Acts of Thomas* is probable, evidence remains inconclusive.”

Now even if some of the *Acts* is accepted as probable, the composer of this entry has still got the story wrong. He uses the word “allegedly” for the visit of St. Thomas to the court of Gondophernes — assuming that Gondophernes is the same as Gundaphorus — when he could correctly cite the *Acts* for the reference.

These errors are deliberate and motivated, given their context and arrangement, and this St. Thomas entry in the *Encyclopaedia* has been written by a Catholic scholar who not only subscribes to the apostle’s alleged South Indian adventure, but wishes to place the Mylapore tale over that of the Malabar tradition. He does this by mixing the North Indian legend, represented by the *Acts*, with the South Indian fable that the Portuguese left in Mylapore, to promote his particular South Indian view. He gets away with the deception because nobody has read

the *Acts of Thomas* and studied its references to the kings Gundaphorus and Misdæus-Mazdai, and the execution of Judas Thomas on a mountain that contained an ancient royal tomb.

It is very disturbing that the editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* accepted this article for publication, and the oft-made charge that the *Encyclopaedia* is Catholic-edited and lacks credibility would seem to be true in this case. The allegation is supported by the fact that only A.E. Medleycott and F.A. D'Cruz, both of them strongly prejudiced Catholic promoters of the Portuguese version of the St. Thomas story, are named as reference. With its prestige and immense resources, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* could have sought another opinion from among the dozens of reputed historians that it ignored.

Yet Bishop Medleycott with his papal mandate and imperial urges, is not the last word on St. Thomas even in the *Encyclopaedia*. It has buried two short items in the macropaedia section: one, under "India", by Frank M. Moraes, a biographer of Nehru and former editor of the *Indian Express*, and the other, under "Indian Subcontinent", by Philip B. Calkins, Professor of History at Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina.

Frank Moraes writes, "Christianity claims to date back to A.D. 52, when St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ, is said to have landed on the west coast of India, where he established a few churches; according to tradition, he travelled from the west coast to the east coast, where he was martyred at Mylapore, in Madras."

This, again, is the South Indian story in general outline, without reference to the *Acts*. But Moraes has not given it correctly, which often happens with writers who don't know the topography of Madras. According to the Portuguese, who invented the Mylapore fable in the sixteenth century, the murder took place on a small hill eight miles south of Mylapore, which is now called St. Thomas Mount.

And Philip Calkins writes, "Legend has it that St. Thomas travelled from western Asia to Malabar in A.D. 52. He is believed to have established a number of Syrian churches, which would perhaps account for Syrian Christianity being the major form of Christianity until the arrival of the Portuguese in India in the 15th century. Historical evidence of the Christian community cannot be found, however, earlier than the 7th century A.D."

This entry also follows the South Indian legend without reference to the *Acts*. It is the most cautious statement about St. Thomas in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, yet it too causes misgivings. There is no reason to suggest that St. Thomas established Syrian churches in India — especially when they are called Syrian churches, not Indian churches.<sup>13</sup>

If St. Thomas lived at all, it was in Palestine and Syria, and it was in Syria and Persia, or Parthia, that he proselytised the inhabitants and established churches. This is what the most ancient Alexandrian tradition maintains and what the seventh and eighth century Metropolitans of Fars, Mar Isho Yahb and Mar Thiomothy, testify to when they refuse to submit to the Patriarch of the East at Seleucia-Ctesiphon because their church had been established by Thomas while his had not.<sup>14</sup> The later Edessene tradition is a case of Edessa glorifying an apostle they considered their own — Thomas had visited their city and they possessed his bones — at the expense of India — if of course the "India" of the *Acts* doesn't simply mean Persia.

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13. The churches that are traditionally said to have been established by apostles were known by the names of the cities or countries that they were established in. The famous four were the Churches of Alexandria by Mark, Jerusalem by James, Antioch by Peter and Paul, and Rome by Peter. The Church of Edessa was said to have been established by Addai the disciple of Thomas and the Church of Fars by Thomas himself. But there was no Church of Muziris (as Cranganore was known to the Greeks and Romans) or Shingly (as it was known to the Jews) or Malabar or India in the first centuries C.E.

14. The Church of Seleucia was said to have been established by Aggaeus the disciple of Addai of Edessa in the second century C.E.



The first Christians to emigrate to India came in 345 C.E. They landed at Cranganore in Malabar, the ancient port on the mouth of the Periyar where it joined the Arabian Sea. They were four hundred refugees from Babylon and Nineveh, belonging to seven tribes and seventy-two families. They were fleeing religious persecution under the Persian king Shapur II, who had driven them out of Syria and Mesopotamia because he considered them a state liability. Rome, Persia's arch enemy, had begun to Christianize under Constantine,<sup>15</sup> and Shapur had come to suspect the

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15. Nobody knows whether Emperor Constantine formally converted to Christianity or not. Some say that he declared himself Christian in Gaul, and others that he was forcefully baptized on his deathbed. What is certain is that he patronized the new cult for political reasons and became its saviour when he called the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., where Christianity was officially recognised in the Empire. He retained the title and position of *pontifex maximus* during his lifetime and can be called Christianity's first pope, as the bishop of Rome, whom he elevated, would assume this office after him. Joseph McCabe, telling the horrific story of how Christianity was imposed on the Empire, in *The Testament of Christian Civilization*, writes, "Constantine, natural son of a rural tavern-girl ... and a Roman officer, waded through rivers of blood to the throne, and he was driven from Rome to Constantinople by the scorn of the Romans because he 'put to death, first his excellent ... son, and then the son of his sister, a boy of promising character, then his wife and a number of friends.' This summary statement of a terrible crime, which Eutropius makes ... is confirmed by St. Jerome ... and not now disputed." Mgr. Duchesne, describing the character of the second Christian emperor, Constantine's son Constantius, in *History of the Arians*, writes, "He slew his uncles and his cousins. He had no mercy on the father-in-law whose daughter he had married, or on his relatives in their affliction. He treated his brother infamously ... and he delivered his wife to the barbarians." McCabe continues, "Thus the rule was made safe for the three Christian princes and the bishops. Then the eldest son fell into civil war with the youngest and was slain; Constans, the youngest, proved a monster of vice and tyranny and was assassinated:

allegiances of his Christian subjects.

The Syrian refugees were led by a semi-legendary figure who is known to history variously as Thomas of Cana, Thomas the Merchant, Thomas the Canaanite, Thomas of Jerusalem, Knaye Thoma, Thomas Cananeus, or Thomas Cannaneo. Nothing is known about him except his name, and this migration of Christians also cannot be treated as historical fact. "No deeds of copper plates in the name of Thomas of Cana are now extant," writes C.B. Firth in *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, "...[and] it would be rash to insist upon all the details of the story of Thomas the Merchant as history. Nevertheless the main point — the settlement in Malabar of a considerable colony of Syrians — may well be true."

K.S. Latourette, the American church historian, in *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, supports this view. He does not allow for the possibility of Christians coming to India by any route before the third century. T. Edmunds, the Lutheran church historian of T.B.M. Lutheran College, Porayar, Tamil Nadu, confirms the traditional date of 345 C.E. for the first migration.

Dr. Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East of Trichur, Kerala, in *The Chaldean Syrian Church of the East*, writes, "Most church historians, who doubt

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Constantius, now sole ruler, adopted what some still call the vile heresy of the Arians ... and he turned the Era of Religious Peace which his father was supposed to have inaugurated into an era of such red-hot passion, murder, and torture on religious grounds as the world had never seen before.... It is ironic that the repulsive struggle that fills the first half of the fourth century should have turned upon the question whether Jesus was God or was merely so beautiful a character that he was 'like' God. Still more ironic that the first emperor upon whom the bishops prevailed to adopt the policy of coercion should have adopted also the Arian heresy and applied in its favour the principles of violence, which was, they assured him, consecrated by the interest of religious truth. However that may be, Constantius, surrounded by the vile and unscrupulous eunuchs with whom Constantine had filled his court, made ten times as many Christian martyrs in twenty years as the Pagan emperors had made in two hundred and fifty, and introduced methods of savagery which even the Goths and Vandals would not emulate."

the tradition of the doubting Thomas in India, will admit that there was a church in India in the middle of the sixth century when Cosmas Indicopleustes visited India.... According to Cosmas, Christians existed in Male and at [Quilon] where a bishop, ordained in Persia, lived."

Cosmas the Alexandrian was a theologian, geographer and merchant who traded with Ethiopia and Ceylon. He visited Malabar in 520-525 C.E., and in *Christian Topography* gives the first acceptable evidence for Christian communities in India.

C.B. Firth continues, "The second migration [of Syrian Christians] is dated in the year 823, when a number of Christians from Persia, including two bishops, came to Quilon in Travancore and settled there, having obtained from the local ruler grants of land and various other privileges ... and this time contemporary evidence is available in the form of five copper plates recording various grants to the Christians.

What these plates actually say is uncertain as they are inscribed in Tamil-Malayalam, Pahlavi and Arabic, and some of the signatures appear to be in Hebrew. The only date on the plates, that of the fifth year of Raja Stanu Ravi Gupta, who is identified with Cheraman Perumal, is debatable, as the period of Cheraman Perumal is given variously from the fourth to the ninth century.

There is also the controversial evidence of the Persian "St. Thomas" crosses made of black granite, that have been provisionally dated to the seventh or eighth century.

Rev. C.E. Abraham, in an article in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, writes, "The Persian crosses — or so-called 'Thomas' crosses — with inscriptions in Pahlavi,<sup>16</sup> one found in St. Thomas Mount, Madras, and two in a church in Kottayam in Travancore, are

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16. According to C.P.T. Winckworth, whose translation has been generally accepted, the inscriptions (except for one, which is partly in Syriac) read: "My Lord Christ, have mercy upon Afras, son of Chaharbukht the Syrian, who cut this."

evidence of the connection of the Malabar Church with the Church of Persia."

These crosses may be evidence of the connection of the Christian church in India with Persia, but they may also be evidence of temple destruction and the planting of Christian relics in temple foundations — at least the one on St. Thomas Mount may be so considered.

The motif on this black granite slab is cut in relief, and on each side of the cross, which is surmounted by a descending dove, are pillars crowned with supernatural composite animals, or *yalis*, from whose mouths issue an arch that joins together above the dove.

These *yalis* are Hindu symbols, not Christian, and Ved Prakash, Director of the Institute for the Study of Western Religions, Madras, asserts that the cross on St. Thomas Mount is an over-cut temple stone. He claims support for this view from the most unexpected quarter. Dr. R. Arulappa, the former Roman Catholic archbishop of Madras, in *Punitha Thomaiyar*, says that *yantra* stones in temple foundations were dug up by the Portuguese on three of the four sites in Madras that they associated with St. Thomas and where they built churches — Mylapore, Little Mount at Saidapet, and Big Mount at St. Thomas Mount.

The dove-and-cross motif of this stone has been described by one writer as Manichaeian and by another as Nestorian. Fr. Herman D'Souza, in *In the Steps of St. Thomas*, quoting Francis Gouvea on the sixteenth century Portuguese "excavation" at St. Thomas Mount, identifies the motif with that used by the Knights of Aviz in Portugal.

The solution to this problem of the origin and identification of the Persian crosses and all other relics associated with St. Thomas is to have them examined by independent forensic experts. If the Bishop of Turin could surrender the famous Shroud of Turin, alleged burial cloth of Jesus, to scientists and accept

their verdict that it is a mediaeval fake, then the Archbishop of Madras should be willing to do the same with the various St. Thomas relics in his possession.

But to return to the immediate problem of the origins of Christianity in India.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in its article "Christians of Saint Thomas", says, "The origins of the so-called Malabar Christians is uncertain, though they seem to have been in existence before the 6th century A.D. and probably derive from the missionary activity of the East Syrian (Nestorian) Church — which held that, in effect, the two natures of Christ were two persons, somehow joined in a moral union — centred at Ctesiphon. Despite their geographical isolation, they retained the Chaldean liturgy and Syriac language and maintained fraternal ties with the Babylonian (Baghdad) patriarchate."<sup>17</sup>

Edward Gibbon, writing about the Syrian Christians of Malabar, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, says, "The difference of their character and colour attest the mixture of a foreign race.... Their conformity with the faith and practice of the fifth century world equally disappoint the prejudices of a Papist or Protestant."

And Leonardo Olschki, in *Marco Polo's Asia*, declares, "The Nestorians of India ... venerated St. Thomas as the patron of Asiatic Christianity — mark, not of Indian Christianity."

St. Thomas, then, was not the Apostle of India — as he has so recently been designated by Rome — but the Apostle of the East, and the Church of the East was historically the first Christian church in India.

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17. The correct name of this church is Church of the East (because it was geographically in the Persian Empire, east of Jerusalem and Rome), but it is known by a variety of names, some of which are Church of Persia, Assyria, Mesopotamia, Tigris, Babylon and Seleucia (see note 14).

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Thomas of Cana, the Canaanite merchant from Jerusalem who had led the fourth century migration of Syrian Christians to Malabar, was probably a Manichee Christian. This may be inferred from the name of the Christian quarter that he built, Mahadevarapatnam, at Cranganore, on land that had been given to him and Bishop Joseph of Edessa by Cheraman Perumal. Cranganore had a great Shiva temple in its vicinity, at Tiruvanchikulam, and it was not possible that Christians who followed and fed on the intolerant salvation cult of the Roman Empire would call their quarter after the name of a Hindu deity. Manichaeism, on the other hand, was a benign, eclectic religion that mixed the teachings of Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses and Jesus in a cosmic system devised by Mani, a third century Parthian aristocrat who had studied in a Judeo-Christian community of Baptists in southern Babylonia. Mani called himself the Apostle of Light and said that he was the last prophet after a long line that had begun with Adam. His religion was evangelical and ascetic, and tended to take on the form of the religious culture of the place it was in. As it flourished in a Mesopotamia and Persia that had been christianized by St. Thomas and his disciples, it was a form of Gnostic Christianity not very different from that of Bardesanes and the *Acts of Thomas*. Mani had studied the teachings of Bardesanes and apocryphal Christian texts like the *Acts* formed part of the Manichaean canon. Indeed, there were very striking similarities between the story of Mani and that of Judas Thomas. They preached in the same places in the Persian Empire, performed the same miracles, used the same ritual

chrism or baptism with oil, and laid the same emphasis on sexual continence. Mani is also said to have converted a king of India, probably in Baluchistan which is the furthest east he travelled, and he was martyred even as Judas Thomas, by a Zoroastrian king at Gondeshapur in Fars.

Henry Love, writing about the establishment of the first Syrian church in Malabar, in *Vestiges of Old Madras*, says, "Whether the founder of this church was the apostle, or Thomas the Manichaeian who lived in the third century, or whether the Christians named themselves after Thomas the Armenian ... is a debatable matter which need not be discussed."

Thomas of Cana — or his bishop from Edessa, Joseph — can be said to be the founder of the church in Malabar, but within a hundred years of his death it would join itself to the Nestorian Church at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which in turn was closely linked to the Church of Edessa. Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, in *Eastern Christianity in India*, gives the date of this event as about 450 C.E., and it is because of the union that the Church of the East can be said to be the first Christian church in India — Manichaeism being a religion in its own right.

The attachment of the Syrian Christians of Malabar to the Nestorian Church was necessitated by their geographical isolation. They required bishops with a valid ordination and these could only be obtained from Mesopotamia and Persia. But there was a sentimental attraction too. The Nestorians also revered St. Thomas — Edessa had become their theological stronghold — and Nestorian bishops wholeheartedly promoted his cult in India.

This cult amounted to a kind of St. Thomas religion, and this is attested to by Bishop Jordan, the French Dominican friar who was sent to Quilon by Pope John XXII, in 1330, to convert the Syrians to the Roman creed. Friar Jordan soon had to abandon his Indian flock as incorrigible, and in *Marvels Described*, writes, "In this India there is a scattered people, one here, another

there, who call themselves Christian, but are not so, nor have they baptism, nor do they know anything about the faith: nay, they believe St. Thomas the Great to be Christ."

There was a good reason for this identification of St. Thomas with Jesus — aside from their physical resemblance<sup>18</sup> — and the Syrian Christians seem to have retained a memory of it from their Judeo-Gnostic origins. These origins were indicated by the appellation "Nazarene" or "Nazarani" (being the same as the biblical "Nazarite") which they carried into the seventeenth century, along with uncut hair that was worn tied up with a cross in a top-knot.

The Nazarenes were an ancient Jewish sect whose most famous member before Jesus<sup>19</sup> was Samson, known from the *Old Testament* story. They gave special importance to uncut hair, which they believed to contain divine power, and were later associated with the Essenes, the nationalistic religious community on the Dead Sea to which Jesus and Thomas belonged.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Rupert Furneau, in *The Other Side of the Story*, says that Jesus and Thomas were look-alike twins, and that Thomas capitalized on the resemblance wherever he went. Furneau quotes the famous Austrian historian and archaeologist Robert Isaac Eisler, who reconstructs the description of Jesus — and thus of Thomas — found in the *Antiquities* of Josephus, after removing the fanciful interpolations that Christian editors had made in the text. Eisler writes, "His nature and form were human; a man of simple appearance, mature age, dark skin, small stature, three cubits [four feet six inches] high, hunch-backed, with a long face, long nose, and meeting eyebrows, so that they who see him might be affrighted, with scanty hair with a parting in the middle of the head, after the manner of the Nazarites, and with an undeveloped beard." The hunched back of Jesus and Thomas is attributed to their profession of carpenter.

19. Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, in *The Messianic Legacy*, write, "Jesus almost certainly was not 'of Nazareth'. An overwhelming body of evidence indicates that Nazareth did not exist in biblical times. The town is unlikely to have appeared before the third century. 'Jesus of Nazareth', as most biblical scholars would now readily concur, is a mistranslation of the original Greek phrase 'Jesus the Nazarene'.

20. Studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls done by Barbara Theiring over a twenty year period, some of the results of which are contained in her book *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls*, reveal that John the



The Nazarenes did not originally regard Jesus as divine or a universal saviour of mankind, though they did believe him to be their promised messiah. His twin brother Thomas was revered as co-messiah with him, and together they constituted the hereditary king and high priest of Israel, in the royal line of David. Their nationalistic cult spread northwards among the Jews, to supplant the similar and ancient Greek cult of the Divine Twins, Castor and Pollux, at Edessa. Judas Thomas had visited Edessa after sending his disciple Addai there, to instruct the king in his Nazarene doctrine. The creed demanded strict adherence to orthodox Jewish law and recognition of Jesus as messiah and earthly king of Israel. It repudiated the Virgin Birth and Resurrection, and maintained a militant hostility towards Paul and the whole edifice of Pauline thought. This meant that Jesus was not Christ — an idea that Paul had borrowed from Greek philosophy — but resurgent Israel's national saviour.

The Nazarene hierarchy of Jerusalem had fled to Edessa prior to the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 C.E., and it is only after the Nazarenes had lost the national cause that Jesus and Judas Thomas took on divine roles. Paul's Greek — some say Gnostic — ideas were accepted over those of orthodox Judaism, and for the first time in history the appellation "Christian" came into use in Syria, even as the first Christian church was built at Edessa on the ruins of the demolished Greek temple. Jesus and Judas had ousted Castor and Pollux. Later, near the end of the second century, the Abgar, Edessa's prince and Bardesanes's friend, was baptized a Christian and Edessa became a Christian state.

But from the beginning of the Christian era to the Arab invasions of the seventh century, Judas Thomas was and remained the central object of worship at Edessa. He had lived and

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Baptist, Jesus, Mary and the disciples including Paul, were members of the Essene community at Qumran on the Dead Sea. Theiring says that Jesus married twice, fathered children, married one of his daughters to Paul, survived the crucifixion, and died of old age at Rome.

taught in the city and if he did not die there, his body was returned soon afterwards from Persia. His cult was brought to India by Thomas of Cana and the four hundred Syrian refugees he led, in 345 C.E., and even as St. Thomas was identified with Jesus, so Thomas of Cana came to be identified with St. Thomas within a few generations of his death in Malabar.

This is an old idea. Henry Love had suggested it in the last century, in *Vestiges of Old Madras*, and before him England's greatest historian, Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, had asked if the Indian Thomas was an apostle, an Armenian merchant, or a Manichaeon. Major T.R. Vedantham had again questioned the identity of St. Thomas in 1987, in the "St. Thomas Legend", serialized in the *South Madras News*. He had carefully reviewed the material available and come to the inescapable conclusion that Thomas of Cana was the man whom Syrian Christians had made into their Indian apostle St. Thomas.

Marco Polo, the famous Venetian traveller, is said to have visited South India twice, in 1288 and 1292, where he saw a tomb of St. Thomas "at a certain little town" which he does not name. Many historians accept these dates and visits without question, and identify the little town that he speaks of with Mylapore. Yet it would appear that they are mistaken about the visits, as, indeed, was Marco Polo about the tomb of St. Thomas.

Macro Polo left Acre, in Palestine, about 1272, carrying an introduction to the Mongol emperor, Kublai Khan, from his friend Pope Gregory X. He travelled with his father and uncle, by land, following the Silk Road north and east to China, which he reached about three years later. He remained in China for the next seventeen years, and was said to be at Yang-chou, in Kansu, around 1287. It is thus not possible for him to have been in South India in 1288 and this date can be rejected.

Macro Polo left China about 1292 with a fleet of fourteen ships, six hundred courtiers and sailors, and a princess whom he was to deliver to a khan in Persia. He sailed to Sumatra where he passed the monsoon, passed by the Nicobar Islands, passed through the Palk Strait into the Gulf of Mannar, stopped in Ceylon where he first heard the story of St. Thomas, then proceeded up the west coast of India and along the south coast of Persia until he reached Hormuz. From there he travelled by land to Khorasan with the princess, and then returned to Europe.

Macro Polo thus did not visit the Coromandel Coast in 1292 either, though this date still attracts many historians. Fosco Maraini, the Marco Polo authority at the University of Florence,

in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, is very positive about Marco Polo's route and it did not include Mylapore.

We would like to leave Marco Polo here but unfortunately he wrote a book, or, rather, dictated it to a fellow prisoner in Genoa — Venice and Genoa were always quarrelling — one Rustichello, a writer of chivalrous romances and popular fiction. The book was officially called the *Description of the World* but soon came to be known as the *Milione*, a name which has the implied meaning of "tall tale". In it Marco Polo says that he visited every place that he describes, though this was obviously not possible and evidently not true of the Coromandel. Dante Alighieri, author of *The Divine Comedy* and Marco Polo's contemporary, seems to have regarded the book as a dangerous and impious invention. But it was an instant success in Venice and within a year was being read throughout southern Europe.

Marco Polo is the first writer in history to locate the tomb of St. Thomas on a seashore and by doing so he revolutionizes the legend. All documents in the world prior to his locate the tomb on a mountain following the *Acts of Thomas*. Marco Polo is also the first writer in history to locate the tomb in South India, in a certain unnamed town, though some Christian scholars argue that Metropolitan Mar Solomon of Basra, in his *Book of the Bee*, ca. 1222, did this before him. They identify Mar Solomon's Mahluph with Mylapore, but do this after the fact of the Portuguese identification of Mylapore with St. Thomas. There is no existing original manuscript of the *Book of the Bee* — as there is none of the *Milione* — and various copies of it give various places of burial. One says "Mahluph" which has never been identified, a second "India" but not which India or where in which India, a third "Edessa", and a fourth "Calamina". Mar Solomon's contemporary neighbour Bishop Bar-Hebraeus of Tigris, in his *Matthaeus* and *Syriac Chronicle*, ca. 1250, is more consistent. Like Mar Solomon (and the earlier writers mentioned

below in note 21), he says that St. Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes and Indians (some add Hyrcanians and Bactrians), but in his books he asserts that the apostle was killed and buried at Calamina.<sup>21</sup>

Marco Polo collected his stories of St. Thomas from the Muslims and Syrian Christians — who were known to Europeans as Nestorians — in the ports of Ceylon and Malabar. However, Leonardo Olschki, in *Marco Polo's Asia*, accepts Marco Polo's claim that he had visited a Christian shrine in the Coromandel, and also the opinion that the identity of the town that contained the shrine was Mylapore, but he does not accept that the shrine was the tomb of St. Thomas. In his commentary on the *Milione*, he writes, "The shrine [of St. Thomas] is portrayed as isolated in a small village remote from everything, but the goal of continual pilgrimages consecrated by ancient and recent miracles. From Marco's references we understand that it was then one of the characteristic Asiatic sanctuaries which, like the supposed tomb of the Magi in Persia, the Manichaean temple at Foochow, Adam's sepulchre in Ceylon, and others not mentioned in the *Milione*, had from time immemorial served the purposes of the various successive cults there, which rose and fell in a fangled mass of traditions, legends, and reciprocal

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21. Hippolytus, the third century Roman theologian and antipope, is the earliest writer to say that St. Thomas was martyred and buried at Calamina, which he claims is in India. He is followed at the end of the third century by Dorotheus of Tyre, and in the seventh century by Sophronius of Jerusalem and Isidore of Seville. Thomas Herbert identifies Calamina with Gouvea in Brazil, T.K. Joseph with Kalawan near Taxila, P.V. Mathew with Bahrain, and Ved Prakash with Kalamai in Greece. Ancient Thebes northwest of Athens may be added to the list of conjectures. It was originally known as Cadmeia and often called that up to the end of the second century C.E. Cadmeia when latinized becomes Calamina. The earth from the single grave of its twin heroes, Amphion and Zethus, was believed to contain great power and was protected, even as the earth of St. Thomas's sepulchre was believed to heal. Cadmean or Thebean earth, called calamine, is pink in colour and used in medicine and metallurgy.

influences now well-nigh impossible to unravel or specify. They are reflected in Marco's data and observations with regard to this dispersed Indo-African Christianity, of which almost nothing is known from other sources but which is still worthy of study.

"The authenticity of St. Thomas's tomb at Mailapur is almost as doubtful as that of Adam's in Ceylon. However, while the latter arouses Marco's suspicions because, as he asserts, the Holy Scriptures place it elsewhere, his critical faculties are lulled by the evidence of the miracles that the apostle continued to work in favour of the Christians of that region. He therefore accepted the opinion of the Nestorians of India, who venerated St. Thomas as the patron of Asiatic Christianity, and was unmindful of those numerous fellow believers who, with more legitimate reasons, had set up a whole mythology about his legendary tomb at Edessa.

"The first to describe this celebrated Indo-Christian sanctuary and to spread its fame abroad with his book, Marco transformed a place of pilgrimage not very widely important into a centre of Christian piety and propaganda, almost a far eastern peer of Santiago de Compostela [in Spain] at the western limits of the European world, with the difference that the tomb of St. Thomas was guarded by Christians opposed to the Church of Rome. The monks who dwelt near by, according to Marco's account, lived on coconuts 'which the land there freely produces'. These religious must have been fairly numerous if, thirty years later, [in 1322,] when the cult was already in its decline, Friar Odoric of Pordenone counted some fifteen buildings about the sanctuary. This had in the meantime become a Hindu temple filled with idols, lacking any visible trace of its ancient Christian cult.<sup>22</sup> Friar John of Monte Corvino, on the other hand, after

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22. The earliest records of the Madras area, including money-lenders' accounts, go back to the fourth century C.E. They identify Mylapore, Triplicane and Tiruvottiyur as temple towns. The *Nandikkalambakkam* describes Mylapore as a prosperous port under the Pallavas, the early-fourth-to-late-ninth

having passed some thirteen months in that region almost contemporaneously with Marco's visit, says nothing of the apostle's tomb, and mentions the church only in passing<sup>23</sup>...

"The story of the apostle's martyrdom told to Marco by the people of the country is far from original, and is probably of local origin.... We read in the *Milione* that St. Thomas ended his days as the victim of a hunting accident when the arrow of a native pagan, aimed at a peacock, pierced the apostle's right side while he was absorbed in prayer<sup>24</sup> ...

"No less worthy is the reference to Thomas's apostolate in Nubia, which, according to information gathered by Marco at this sanctuary, was supposed to have preceded the saint's sojourn in Coromandel; this would make Thomas the apostle of India and Africa, contrary to the legend that represents him as the evangelist of China."<sup>25</sup>

Among the other stories told to Marco Polo by the Syrian Christians, is one that is very revealing. "We also learn from him," writes Olschki, "of the first attempt known to us to suppress

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century emperors of Kanchipuram, who patronized various schools of Hinduism including Jainism and Buddhism, built temples and generously supported the arts. There is no record of a Christian church or saint's tomb at Mylapore before the Portuguese period, and Olschki is basing his comments on the wrong assumption that Marco Polo did visit Mylapore and that he found a church there. Friar Oderic is describing the original Kapaleeswara Shiva Temple on the Mylapore seashore (see Henry Yule's comment on page 60), which Jnanasambandar has positively identified as being there at least before the sixth century C.E.

23. Friar John, in his letters from China (presumably sent to Rome), does not identify the St. Thomas church that he visited or say where it was located. Most scholars believe that he travelled in Malabar and the Konkan only.

24. Olschki's note: "Thus, St. Thomas was supposed to have been a victim but not a martyr — which would add further complications to the already tangled mass of fables concerning his apostolate and his end."

25. Olschki's note: "The oriental ubiquity of St. Thomas's apostolate is explained by the fact that the geographical term 'India' included, apart from the subcontinent of this name, the lands washed by the Indian Ocean as far as the China Sea in the east and the Arabian peninsula, Ethiopia, and the African coast in the west."

this cult, which was carried out ... by the sovereign of that kingdom. Indeed, when a pagan ruler of the region filled with rice the church and monasteries of Mailapur, in order to put an end to the Christian practices of the Nestorian rites, the apostle threateningly appeared to him in a dream and made him so far change his ways as to exempt the faithful from all tribute and to safeguard the church from violation.”

Olschki calls this a conventional piece of hagiography, but there is more in it than the pious account of a saint exercising his power over a persecuting ruler.

The Hindu king did not of course violate a church — in all of Indian history there is no evidence of such acts; Hindu kings gave generous donations for the building of churches and had already done so in Malabar — nor would he have objected to the rites that were being performed in a Christian church. The king would have objected to Christian rites being performed in a Hindu temple, and would have certainly put a stop to them. He would have had the temple filled with raw rice as part of a *śuddhi* (purification) or *pratiṣṭhā* (consecration) ritual; or, again, he would have been doing *anna abhiṣekam* (food offering) to the Lord by filling the sanctum with huge quantities of cooked rice — even as it is done today in the great Shiva temples of South India.

What emerges from this story is that the Syrian Christians were worshipping in a Hindu temple, which they called a church, at least up to 1322 when Friar Oderic visited Mylapore. Henry Yule, in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, referring to Friar Oderic’s description of the church, declares, “This is clearly a Hindu temple.”<sup>26</sup>

Marco Polo did not visit Mylapore; indeed, Mylapore is not identified in the *Milione* though it may be inferred to be the destination of Christian pilgrims from later traveller’s tales.

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26. See note 22.



Marco Polo is only repeating the pious stories of Christians and Muslims — the latter also claimed St. Thomas; he was, they told Marco, not only an apostle from Nubia, but a Muslim apostle<sup>27</sup> — who apparently worshipped in a Hindu temple, each justifying his presence there by identifying the shrine with his own Thomas.<sup>28</sup>

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27. See T.K. Joseph's *Six St. Thomases of South India: A Muslim Non-Martyr (Thawwama) made Martyrs after 1517 A.D.*

28. The Syriac "Thoma" and "Thama" and Arabic "Thuma" and "Thawwama" are variations of the name Thomas. They all have the same meaning — "born twin" — and were common names in the Christian and Muslim communities of India and West Asia.

Bishop Giovanni dei Marignolli, a Franciscan friar from Florence, visited Mylapore in 1349 on his return journey to Italy from China. His notes are full of St. Thomas exotica. He had baptized some Syrian Christians and lower caste Hindus the year before, in Quilon, and built a Roman Catholic church there. He is the first person on record to use the appellation "St. Thomas" Christians. He did this to distinguish the Syrian Christians in his congregation from the lower caste converts. Niccolo dei Conti, from Venice, visited in ca. 1425, and records that there were about a thousand Nestorians, i.e., Syrian Christians, in Mylapore. Lodovico de Varthema, from Bologna, visited between 1503 and 1508, and Durate Barbosa, the first Portuguese visitor, came in 1509, and describes a "St. Thomas tomb" in a dilapidated building that was occupied by a Muslim fakir. Diogo Fernandez, also Portuguese, came in 1517 with some Armenian merchants who were returning to Malabar from Malacca. He is an ambiguous figure who will play a key role in the evolution of the St. Thomas myth after Mylapore was occupied by the Portuguese.

Lodovico de Varthema and Duarte Barbosa were soldiers of fortune, who spent their time at Vijayanagar. There is no reason to believe that they actually visited Mylapore. Their stories, like Marco Polo's, were collected in the bazaar from Muslim and Christian pilgrims and retold in their adventure books, to please the European audience of the day. Conti's account, called *India in the Fifteenth Century*, is more serious and considered authentic. But whether or not these travellers actually came to

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

Mylapore is not important; they are all repeating the same St. Thomas tale told up and down the southern coasts by the Syrian Christians.

Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut in 1498 with the help of an Arab pilot. He was a clever navigator and one of history's most brutal men,<sup>29</sup> but he was not very bright when it came to religion. He thought Calicut was a Christian city and returned to Portugal with the impression that the temples he had prayed in were churches. Catholic historians still argue that he saw two hundred thousand Christians on his first visit to Malabar, when in fact he had seen only Hindus whose piety he had unwittingly praised and whose wealth he coveted for his own.

Vasco da Gama's mistake was corrected when he returned to Malabar in 1502 and was met by a deputation of Syrian Christians. They identified themselves, surrendered their ancient honours and documents, and invited him to make war on their Hindu king.

George Menachery, a Catholic apologist and former adviser to the Kerala State Department of Archaeology, in *Kodungallur: City of St. Thomas*, writes, "They presented him a 'Rod of Justice' and swore allegiance to the Portuguese king and implored Portuguese protection. The Admiral received them very kindly and promised all help and protection. The significance of this

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29. Sita Ram Goel, in *Papacy: Its Doctrine and History*, writes, "Vasco da Gama had bombarded Calicut when the Zamorin ruler of that place refused to be dictated by him. He had plundered the ships bringing rice to the city and cut off the ears, noses and hands of the crews. The Zamorin had sent to him a Brahmin envoy after securing Portuguese safe-conduct. Vasco da Gama had cut off the nose, ears and hands of the Brahmin and strung them around his neck together with a palm-leaf on which a message was conveyed to the Indian king that he could cook and eat a curry made from his envoy's limbs."

event is variously interpreted by historians."

Indeed it is — but only Catholic historians prevaricate on why this high-ranking community of merchants and soldiers had turned on their king in this perfidious way.

K.M. Panikkar, in *Malabar and the Portuguese*, writes, "More than this, they suggested to [Vasco da Gama] that with their help he should conquer the Hindu kingdoms and invited him to build a fortress for this purpose in Cranganore. This was the recompense which the Hindu rajas received for treating with liberality and kindness the Christians in their midst."

The Syrians had of course acted on the exigencies of their Christian religion, which harbours in its heart a demon that divides mankind into friend and foe on ideological grounds. King Shapur of Persia had not been mistaken about the allegiances of his Christian subjects in the fourth century.

The Syrian Christians would soon come to grief for their treachery. The Portuguese regarded them as heretics and schismatics who were no better in True Religion than their Hindu neighbours. They had come with cannon and a papal mandate to instruct the inhabitants of the land in the Catholic faith and this included non-Roman Christians. Their arrival and that of the first Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, in 1542, turned Christianity in India into a violent and destructive political force that continues to operate in the country till today.

After 1502, the Syrian Christians and Roman Catholic Church embarked on a confrontation. It went on for decades and was aggravated by the activities of the Jesuits. In 1653 a Syrian bishop was burned at the stake at Goa by the Inquisition — which had been invited into the country by Francis Xavier himself. The confrontation only began to subside with the decline of Portuguese power, as the Pope and the Jesuits were both dependant on Portuguese arms to enforce their will. A compromise was eventually reached between the Catholic Church and

the Syrian Christians, and various oriental rite churches came into being. But whatever the arrangements or relationship with Rome, the Jesuits, true to their evil genius, had succeeded in destroying the Syrian Christian community in India. There is some justice in this fate, for had the Syrian Christians remained true to their country and king, they would have remained a happy, respected and united community.

The Portuguese had come to India to spread their religion and to trade — in that order, too, which is why Portugal is a poor country today even after ruling rich colonies. In the process they acquired the raw materials for a new cult, the St. Thomas legend, which would prove to be their most enduring “gift” to Mylapore — along with a large number of churches that have been built on temple sites around the southern coasts. The cult would also give imported Christianity the veneer of being an indigenous Indian religion, a political gift to the Catholic Church more valuable than all the pearls and pepper that went to Lisbon.

## 10

The Portuguese were familiar with the St. Thomas legend long before they arrived in India. They knew Marco Polo's *Milione*, made popular in Europe in the fourteenth century, and the earlier, sixth century Latin romances *De Miraculis Thomae* and *Passio Thomae*. The *Passio Thomae* was a redaction of the *Acts of Thomas*, but both Latin books contained a major diversion from the original story that would, like the seashore tomb in the *Milione*, permanently alter the course of the St. Thomas legend after the Portuguese had established themselves in Mylapore. The *Passio Thomae* had St. Thomas killed by a Pagan priest with a sword, and *De Miraculis Thomae* had him killed by a Pagan priest with a lance. These stories were at odds with the one found in the *Acts of Thomas*, which had the apostle executed on the orders of a king, by four royal soldiers with spears.

The Portuguese preferred the Pagan-priest-with-a-lance story found in *De Miraculis Thomae*. They added Marco Polo's seaside tomb to it, and elements from Syrian Christian traditions that they had gathered in Malabar, and concocted a legend, largely European in character, that they identified with various Hindu sites in Malabar and Mylapore.

This basic story has not changed very much till today, though it has many variations. Victor J.F. Kulanday, in *The Paganization of the Church in India*, writes, "According to tradition, hallowed by time and strongly held by the Christians of Kerala, St. Thomas after visiting Socotra, an island in the Arabian Sea, landed near Cranganore on the Periyar estuary, north

of Cochin in 52 A.D.<sup>30</sup> He preached the Gospel and converted a number of people to Christianity. Later, he travelled further south and converted many more. Among those who embraced Christianity were several Namboodiri Brahmin families considered among Hindus as the highest class. He ordained priests from four of these families — Pakalomatton, Shankarapuri, Kalli and Kaliankal. He founded churches in seven places — Maliankara, Palayur, Parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Quilon.<sup>31</sup>

“From the west coast he proceeded to the east and further to Malacca and China. He is believed to have returned after some time to Madras. There his preaching aroused hostility among Brahmins and he was speared to death on July 3, 72 A.D. He met his end on a hill now bearing the name St. Thomas Mount.<sup>32</sup> He

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30. The various dates given for St. Thomas's arrival in Malabar and death near Madras are nineteenth century additions to the legend. Some of the dates given for his arrival are 50, 51, 53, 58, 65, 67 and 68 C.E., and for his death are 73, 75, 78, 82, 90 and 93 C.E.

31. The archaeological evidence indicates that these churches were built after the ninth century by Nestorian immigrants from Persia. The famous church at Palayur north of Cranganore was built by the Portuguese and is dedicated to the fourth century martyr St. Cyriac (Mar Kuriakkos Sahada). Fr. Herman D'Souza, in *In the Steps of St. Thomas*, writes, “The [Palayur] temple deserted by the Brahmins as a result of St. Thomas's efforts, was turned into a church. Pieces of broken idols and remnants of the old temple were lying around the church till a short time ago. Two large tanks, one on the eastern side of the church and the other near the western gate, are tell-tale relics of the ancient glory of the Hindu temple.” D'Souza was writing in 1983 and includes pictures of the old temple walls, well and tank in his book. He is blaming St. Thomas for the temple-breaking activities of the Portuguese and Syrian Christians.

32. This hill is crowned with a Portuguese church dedicated to the Virgin as Our Lady of Expectation, and was built around 1547 on the foundations of a demolished Vishnu temple. It contains a wooden icon of the Virgin said to have been painted by St. Luke and given to St. Thomas at Jerusalem, an eighth century Persian “bleeding” cross said to have been carved by St. Thomas (which stopped bleeding as soon as the British moved into the area), and two paintings of St. Thomas and his spear-bearing Hindu assassin. The older painting fixed behind the altar suggests an Iyengar brahmin wearing *nāmam* on his forehead, about to stab the praying apostle from behind, and the other painting, one of a series of the martyred apostles, shows an unidentified Hindu as the assassin.



was buried at a place called Mylapore in Madras. Over his tomb now stands the Basilica of San Thome."<sup>33</sup>

One version of the fable asserts that he converted 6,850 Brahmins, 2,800 Kshatriyas, 3,750 Vaishyas and 4,250 Shudras. Another version maintains it was 17,490 Brahmins, 350 Vaishyas and 4,280 Shudras — Kshatriyas are not included except for the Raja of Tiruvanchikulam. In a third version 40 Jews are among the converts, and in a fourth the converts are the Raja's son and son-in-law, some Brahmins, and a lone barber to keep them shaved.

There are also the miracles, all carefully catalogued by the Portuguese: 19 raised from the dead, 260 exorcised of their demons, 330 cured of leprosy, 250 of blindness, 120 of paralysis and 20 of dumbness.

And there is the famous curse of Cochin, that its inhabitants might suffer from elephantiasis which is now called St. Thomas Foot.

This is the South Indian version of the St. Thomas fable which now passes for Indian history. It was compiled by the Portuguese, but T.K. Joseph, a "St. Thomas" Christian scholar (the first to put the appellation between quotation marks), in *Six St. Thomases of South India*, points out that the legend is now said to be based on the alleged but non-existent *St. Thomas Biography* composed by a St. Thomas disciple in 73 C.E. The *Biography*, which nobody has ever seen, is said to be summarised in the *St. Thomas Song* "of 1601", which, again, is the same as the *Rabban Pattu* that was composed by Varghese

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33. This nineteenth century Gothic cathedral replaces the sixteenth century Portuguese church that was built on the site of the demolished Kapaleeswara Temple. It is dedicated to St. Thomas and contains two of his tombs, two sets of his relics including the bone from Ortona, Italy, and the metal spearhead that is said to have killed him. Other churches in Madras that are associated with St. Thomas and are identified as having been built on temple sites are Luz Church in Mylapore and Our Lady of Health Church on Little Mount at Saidapet.

Palayur in 1892 and first published in 1916 by Fr. Bernard of Travancore.

Now the fact that the South Indian St. Thomas story was not written down until 1892, as T.K. Joseph testifies, is an extraordinary circumstance for so famous a piece of Indian "history". It also brings Bishop Medleycott of Trichur back into the picture. He was the great St. Thomas advocate in South India from 1887 to 1896, and had the motive and means to assist Varghese Palayur in his "ancient" composition. The Vatican has since declared the apostolate of St. Thomas in South India as unverified, after studying the *Rabban Pattu*, but the Roman Catholic Church in India then and now is still the only entity that reaps any benefit from the propagation of the myth among Indians.

Whatever the truth of the matter and whoever the real author of the current South Indian legend — aside from the Portuguese — Vincent A. Smith, in *The Oxford History of India*, writes, "Both stories [— the one in the *Acts* and the one in South India —] obviously cannot be true; even an apostle can die but once. My personal impression, formed after much examination of the evidence, is that the story of the martyrdom in southern India is the better supported of the two versions of the saint's death. But it is by no means certain that St. Thomas was martyred at all. An early writer, Heracleon the Gnostic, asserts that he ended his days in peace."

Heracleon was from Italy or Sicily and flourished around ca. 180 C.E. He led a westernizing Italian school of Gnosticism, probably at Rome, which diverged from the better known oriental school of Valentinus that Bardesanes followed. His testimony regarding the natural death of St. Thomas carries more weight than that of Bardesanes who mythicized the apostle thirty years later in the *Acts*, to promote his theological views.

A.D. Burnell, in an article in the *Indian Antiquary* of May 1875, writes, "The attribution of the origin of South Indian

Christianity to the apostle Thomas seems very attractive to those who hold certain theological opinion. But the real question is, on what evidence does it rest? Without real or sufficient evidence so improbable a circumstance is to be at once rejected. Pious fictions have no place in historical research."

Prof. Jarl Charpentier, in *St. Thomas the Apostle and India*, writes, "There is absolutely not the shadow of a proof that an Apostle of our Lord — be his name Thomas or something else — ever visited South India or Ceylon and founded Christian communities there."

And Rev. J. Hough, in *Christianity in India*, writes, "It is not probable that any of the Apostles of our Lord embarked on a voyage ... to India."

The Vatican officially stated in 1952 that the landing of St. Thomas at Cranganore in 52 C.E. was "unverified"<sup>34</sup> (that it would send, in 1953, a piece of the Ortona St. Thomas bone for a pontifical shrine at Azhicode-Kodungallur (Cranganore) is another matter). Before this, in 1729, the Bishop of Mylapore had written to the Sacred Congregation of Rites and asked for verification as to "whether this place be the true sepulchre of St. Thomas". The Vatican's reply has never been published — and we may safely assume that it was a negative reply.

However, the total lack of evidence for the apostolate of St. Thomas in India, did not stop Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI, in letters dated 1886 and 1923, from repeating the refrain found in the heretical *Acts of Thomas*, that India fell to the lot of Thomas, though they were careful not to include Malabar and Mylapore in their references.

Sir Henry Yule, writing in his *Marco Polo* about the Church's position on St. Thomas in Mylapore, in 1903, says, "The question [of St. Thomas] appears to have become a party one among the Romanists in India in connection with other differences, and I see that the authorities now ruling the Catholics at Madras are strong in disparagement of the localities<sup>35</sup> and of the whole story connecting St. Thomas with Mailapur."

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34. This statement was contained in a message dated 13 November 1952 that was sent to India's Christians who were preparing to celebrate the 19th centenary ("21-11-52" to 21-11-1952) of St. Thomas. It is not clear who sent the message, but presumably it was from the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites at Rome.

35. Viz. San Thome and Luz at Mylapore, Little Mount at Saidapet and Big Mount at St. Thomas Mount.

After this disparagement by the Mylapore prelates, came the learned disparagement of T.K. Joseph in a number of books on St. Thomas. He had done years of research on the South Indian tradition, and had presented his findings to a number of famous scholars, who had replied to him by post. In 1926, Prof. E.J. Rapson, who had written on St. Thomas in the *Cambridge History of India*, wrote, "I have read [your letter] carefully, and my impression is that you have given good reasons for doubting the historical truth of the story of St. Thomas in South India." In 1927, Sylvain Levi, the renowned Parisian Indologist and research scholar, wrote, "You are right in denying any historical value to local legends which have nothing to bring to their support. What is known from early books points only to North-West India, and no other place, for St. Thomas's apostolic activity and martyrdom. This is, of course, mere tradition, not real history." In 1952, Prof. K.S. Latourette, the Yale University church historical who had written *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, wrote to T.K. Joseph that the evidence *against* St. Thomas in South India "is very convincing". And in 1953, Fr. H. Heras, S.J., Director of the Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay, wrote, "I am fully convinced that [the tomb of St. Thomas] has never been in Mylapore. I have said that many times." Earlier, in 1944, in *The Two Apostles of India*, he had argued on the basis of Malabar's inauthentic *St. Thomas Song* that St. Thomas was buried at Mylapore.

But when T.K. Joseph wrote to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* editor at Chicago in 1950, pointing out the errors in the *Encyclopaedia's* 1947 Fourteenth Edition St. Thomas article, he was not successful in getting them corrected. We have shown in this book that the St. Thomas article in the *Encyclopaedia's* 1984 Fifteenth Edition is also grossly mistaken. We can only conclude that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* editors like their cooked-up St. Thomas story and plan to keep it for more editions to come.

Whatever the scholars may say against the myth of St. Thomas in Malabar and Mylapore — and some of them are high ranking ecclesiastics of faith and integrity — India's political leaders, in keeping with their own tradition of ignorance and arrogance, have declared differently. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in one of his travel books, "Few people realise that Christianity came to India as early as the first century after Christ, long before Europe turned to it, and established a firm hold in South India. Although these Christians have their religious head in Antioch or elsewhere in Syria, their Christianity is practically indigenous and has few outside contacts.... To my surprise, we also came across a colony of Nestorians in the South. I had laboured under the impression that the Nestorians had long been absorbed in other sects, and I did not know that they had ever flourished in India."

Nehru's ignorance about the Nestorians in Malabar is indeed surprising, considering that their church was the only Christian church in India from the fifth to the fifteenth century.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was more circumspect in his statement. He said, "Christianity has flourished in India from the beginning of the Christian era. The Syrian Christians of Malabar believe that their form of Christianity is apostolic, derived directly from the Apostle Thomas. What is obvious is that there have been Christians in the West Coast of India from very early times."

But Dr. Rajendra Prasad's St. Thomas Day speech at New Delhi, in 1955, where he parroted Nehru, was simply rash. He said, "Remember St. Thomas came to India when many countries

in Europe had not yet become Christian and so these Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of the European countries. And it is a matter of pride for us that it happened ...”

These statements would not be of any consequence in most countries of the world, made as they are by self-seeking politicians for their constituents. But in India the politician has usurped the authority of all professionals including the scholar, and their statements, thoughtless or motivated, are treated as God’s own truth by everybody.

The myth of St. Thomas has also found sponsors in Madras City’s English-language press. Both *The Hindu* and *Indian Express* have published sanitized versions of the story on the children’s page of their newspapers after receiving copies of the first edition of this book. Their decision to do this was clearly made with malice aforethought and it has effectively put an end to any serious public discussion of St. Thomas in India.

T.T. Maps and Publications Ltd., the T.T.K. guidebook producer, has been as exploitive of the public trust and unprincipled in their conduct as the newspapers. They, too, after receiving a copy of the first edition of this book, have expanded on the fable of St. Thomas as history, bowdlerized the real story of San Thome Cathedral and the Kapaleeswara Temple, and published it all in *A Road Guide to Madras*.

Yet whatever effort Hindu publishers have put into promoting the St. Thomas myth in Madras, it still belongs very much to the Roman Catholic Church and is subject to her various conceits. When she wants to present herself as being socially conscious — which she is not and has never been — then St. Thomas too must be presented as having had a social conscience. In an *Indian Express* article called “In Memory of a Slain Saint”, in 1989, C.A. Simon writes, “The oppressed and the downtrodden followed [St. Thomas] and claimed equal status in society as it

was denied them by the prevailing social norms. He condemned untouchability and attempted to restore equal status for women."

C.A. Simon's assertion is pure invention of course. St. Thomas was executed for crimes against society — whether in India or Parthia it does not matter here — and these crimes included the subversion of family life, enslavement of free-born women in the name of Jesus, and sorcery. Untouchability is still rampant among "St. Thomas" Christians today and has the sanction of the Church in the form of a bull issued by Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623) authorizing caste divisions within Catholic life. Indeed, the repressive social and religious theories contained in the *Acts of Thomas* and earlier *Gospel of Thomas*<sup>36</sup> — which confines St. Thomas to Palestine — and in the *New Testament* itself, show these preposterous claims for St. Thomas to be motivated additions to a fable that is already overburdened with moralistic wonders.

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36. The second century Coptic text of this Gnostic gospel, probably written in Syria, was discovered in Egypt in 1946. It contains the secret sayings of Jesus as recorded by St. Thomas. Some of the sayings are:

16. Jesus said: Perhaps men think that I came to cast peace on the world; and they do not know that I came to cast division upon the earth, fire, sword, war. For five will be in a house; there will be three against two and two against three, the father against the son and the son against the father. And they will stand because they are single ones.
42. Jesus said: He who has (something) in his hand, to him it will be given; and he who has nothing, from him even the little he has will be taken away.
56. Jesus said: He who will not hate his father and his mother cannot be my disciple. And he who will not hate his brothers and his sisters, and carry his cross as I have, will not become worthy of me.
112. Simon Peter said to them: Let Mariham go away from us. For women are not worthy of life. Jesus said: Lo, I will draw her so that I will make her a man so that she too may become a living spirit which is like you men; for every woman who makes herself a man will enter into the kingdom of heaven.



Sita Ram Goel, the only Indian historian working today who has a clear understanding of Christian theory and practice, in *Papacy: Its Doctrine and History*, writes, "The manufacturers of this myth about St. Thomas may be asked a simple question: What difference does it make whether Christianity came to India in the first or the fourth century? Why raise such a squabble when no one denies that the Syrian Christians of Malabar are old immigrants to this country?"

"The matter, however, is not so simple as it sounds at first. Nor can the scholarly exercise be understood easily by those who have not been initiated in the intricacies of Catholic theology.

"Firstly, it is one thing for some Christian refugees to come to a country and build some churches, and quite another for an apostle of Jesus Christ himself to appear in flesh and blood for spreading the Good News. If it can be established that Christianity is as ancient in India as the prevailing forms of Hinduism, no one can nail it down as an imported creed brought in by Western imperialism.

"Secondly, the Catholic Church in India stands badly in need of a spectacular martyr of its own. Unfortunately for it, St. Francis Xavier died a natural death and that, too, in a distant place. Hindus, too, have persistently refused to oblige the Church in this respect, in spite of all provocations. The Church has to use its own resources and churn out something. St. Thomas, about whom nobody knows anything, offers a ready-made martyr.

"Thirdly, the Catholic Church can malign the Brahmins more confidently. Brahmins have been the main target of its

attack from the very beginning. Now it can be shown that the Brahmins have always been a vicious brood, so much so that they would not stop from murdering a holy man who was only telling God's own truth to a tormented people. At the same time, the religion of the Brahmins can be held responsible for their depravity.

"Fourthly, the Catholics in India need no more feel uncomfortable when faced with historical evidence about their Church's close cooperation with the Portuguese pirates, in committing abominable crimes against the Indian people. The commencement of the Church can be disentangled from the advent of the Portuguese by dating the Church to some distant past. The Church was here long before the Portuguese arrived. It was a mere coincidence that the Portuguese also called themselves Catholics. Guilt by association is groundless.

"Lastly, it is quite within the ken of Catholic theology to claim that a land which has been honoured by the visit of an apostle has become a patrimony of the Catholic Church. India might have been a Hindu homeland from times immemorial, but since that auspicious moment when St. Thomas stepped on her soil, the Hindu claim stands cancelled. The country has belonged to the Catholic Church from the first century onwards, no matter how long the Church takes to conquer it completely for Christ."

The conquering of India for Christ by the Popes and their Portuguese "secular arm" started in earnest with the arrival in India of Pedro Alvares Cabral in 1500. His fleet, the first to reach Calicut after Vasco da Gama's bloody landing, carried eight ordinary priests and eight Franciscan friars. C.B. Firth, in *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, explains, "Though it was the hope of gain that brought the Portuguese adventurers to India, it was also the purpose of their kings to promote the spread of Christianity among those who came under their rule. On this ground several of the fifteenth century Popes granted them rights of dominion and commercial monopoly in the newly acquired territories. A modern reader will wonder what right the Popes had to do this; but in mediaeval Europe theologians held that the Pope, as Vicar of Christ, had a direct domination over the kingdoms of the earth, and so such grants did not seem outrageous — not to the beneficiaries at any rate. In a famous bull of 1493 Pope Alexander VI,<sup>37</sup> to settle rivalry between Spain and Portugal, the two colonial powers of those days, drew a line down the map of the Atlantic Ocean south of the Azores Islands to form a boundary between their respective spheres of influence. All lands not

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37. This Vicar of Christ was known as Alexander the Scabrous and ruled from 1492 to 1503. Joseph McCabe, in *A Testament of Christian Civilization*, writes, "He brought into Italy [from Spain] an unscrupulous brood of relatives, the Borgias, who spread graft and depravity on all sides and opened the vilest page in history of the higher authorities of any known religion." He played vicious power politics, practiced simony, held famous public orgies in the Apostolic Palace, committed incest with his daughter, went whoring with his son, poisoned his cardinals to get their wealth, and himself died of poisoning. The legend on his triumphal arch read "Chastity and Charity".

already under Christian rule 'discovered or yet to be discovered' to the west of the line, he assigned to Spain; those to the east, to Portugal. Along with this fantastique enactment went a command to the Spanish and Portuguese kings 'to send to the said lands and islands good men who fear God and are learned, skilled and expert, to instruct the inhabitants in the Catholic Faith and good morals'. Moreover, other foreigners were forbidden to enter those lands without licence from these kings. Whatever may be thought nowadays of such orders, the Spaniards and Portuguese were prepared to act on them; and not only in claiming and exercising, as far as they were able, rights of dominion and trade; they were seriously prepared to propagate Christianity."<sup>38</sup>

K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, in *A History of South India*, tells the story of the propagation of Christianity in India. He writes, "[The Portuguese] acted throughout as if they had a divine right to the pillage, robbery, and massacre of the natives of India. Not to mince matters, their whole record is one of a series of atrocities. They delighted particularly in plundering all rich temples within their reach, even Tirupati not escaping their predatory attentions.... The Roman Catholic missionaries, headed by St. Francis Xavier,<sup>39</sup> were

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38. This paragraph fully exposes the hollowness of the Catholic apologists' claim that the Church's association with Portuguese imperialism was unwilling and an unfortunate accident of history.

39. In a letter to the Society of Jesus, quoted by Sita Ram Goel in *St. Francis Xavier: The Man and His Mission*, Xavier wrote, "Following the baptisms, the new Christians return to their homes and come back with their wives and families to be in their turn also prepared for baptism. After all have been baptized, I order that everywhere the temples of the false gods be pulled down and idols broken. I know not how to describe in words the joy I feel before the spectacle of pulling down and destroying the idols by the very people who formerly worshipped them." Xavier did this after the Hindu raja of Quilon had given him a large grant to build churches. In another letter he writes, "There are in these parts among the pagans a class of men called Brahmins. They are as perverse and wicked a set as can anywhere be found, and to whom applies the Psalm which says: 'From an unholy race, and wicked and crafty men, deliver me, Lord' If it were not for the Brahmins, we should have all the heathens embracing our faith."

not only forcefully converting to their faith large numbers on the pearl-fishery coast ... but induced the fishermen to transfer their allegiance to the king of Portugal.... The Franciscan friars and Jesuits were busy demolishing temples and building churches in the coastal cities, and the Portuguese governor of Goa was reported to be organising a plundering raid against the rich temples of Kanchipuram.<sup>40</sup> ... The Portuguese policy of [destroying temples and] turning religious propaganda to political use roused the resentment of even the tolerant rulers of Vijayanagar and their Feudatories."

M. Arunachalam, in an article in *Christianity in India: A Critical Study*, writes, "It is well known that the Portuguese sacked the famous Tiruchendur Murugan Temple on the sea coast and threw the idol into the sea. Sometime later, in 1654, the chieftain Vadamalaiyappa Pillai of Tirunelveli, salvaged the idol from the sea and installed it at the present Tiruchendur temple."<sup>41</sup>

He continues, "The Tirumalai Nayak Mahal [at Madurai] is another example. Jealous of its magnificence, the British began

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40. On one of these voyages up the Coromandel Coast the Portuguese were blown ashore in a storm, at a fishing village 12 kms. south of Nagapattinam. They declared that the Virgin Mary had saved them and in thanksgiving took over the local Vel Ilang Kanni Devi Temple (which was the sister shrine of the Vel Thanda Kanni Devi Temple at Sikkil, closer to Nagapattinam). This village has now become the famous Christian pilgrimage centre of Velankanni. The original Devi temple was enclosed within the first Portuguese church, known as the Mada Koil, that is situated at a distance from the present Basilica of Our Lady of Health. The stone image of the Devi was on public display until some years ago, but has since been removed and an image of the Virgin Mary put in its place.

41. The hundreds of temples and thousands of idols destroyed by the Portuguese in Goa has been documented by A.K. Priolkar in *The Goa Inquisition*. And the historian T.R. de Souza, quoted by M.D. David in *Western Colonialism in Asia and Christianity*, writes, "At least from 1540 onwards and in the island of Goa before that year, all Hindu idols had been annihilated or had disappeared, all the temples had been destroyed and their sites and building material were in most cases utilized to erect new Christian churches and chapels."

demolishing it, but public agitation checked it and what we have today is only a part of what was originally there."

The British were generally less destructive than the Portuguese and the French, but they did not hesitate to attack temples that were in the way of construction works or to desecrate them as a means of intimidating the local populace. They fired on the temples of Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh for this last reason; and Victoria Terminus in Bombay is built on the original site of that city's famous Mumbai Devi Temple. In Madras they obliterated the small Hindu shrines that once stood inside Fort St. George. The fort now contains St. Mary's Church, the first Protestant church built east of Suez.

But it is the French who vied with the Portuguese in their Christian zeal to destroy Pagan places of worship. Henry Love, in *Vestiges of Old Madras*, records that they used temples as barracks in their military operations against the British. Between 1672 and 1674, at Madras, they fortified the rebuilt Kapaleeswara Temple in Mylapore and the Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane when they were besieged by Golconda and the Dutch.

Sita Ram Goel, in *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters*, quoting *The Private Diary of Anand Ranga Pillai* translated by J. Frederick Price and K. Rangachari, gives a graphic account of the destruction of the Vedapuri Iswaran Temple at Pondicherry by the French governor's wife, Madame Dupliex, and the Jesuits. He writes, "The Vedapuri Iswaran Temple was the principle place of worship for the Hindus of Pondicherry. The Jesuit missionaries built the Church of St. Paul adjacent to it and obtained an order from the King of France that the Hindu temple should be destroyed ...

"The first incident at the Vedapuri Temple took place on March 17, 1746. 'On Wednesday night at 11,' writes Pillai, 'two unknown persons entered the Iswaran Temple carrying in a vessel of liquid filth, which they poured on the heads of the Gods

around the altar, and into the temple, through the drain of the shrine of Iswaran; and having broken the pot of dirt on the image of the God Nandi, they went away through a part of the building which had been demolished' ...

"As the report of this sacrilege spread, Hindus 'from the Brahmin to the pariah,' held a public meeting. The governor, Dupliex, when he heard of it, sent his chief peon to disperse the meeting.... The people, however, defied the order and protested, 'you better kill us all'...

"The next incident recorded by Pillai took place on December 31, 1746. 'It was reported,' he writes, 'tonight at 7, that an earthen jar, filled with filth, was thrown from within the grounds of the Church of St. Paul, into the Temple of Vedapuri Iswaran. It very nearly fell on the head of Sankara Aiyan, who was at the shrine of the God Pillaiyar, on his way round the temple, in the performance of religious duties. When the jar struck the ground, and broke to pieces, the stench emitted was unbearable'...

"The temple was now doomed to destruction. 'Yesterday,' Pillai continued in his diary of September 8, '200 soldiers, 60 or 70 troopers and sepoy were stationed at St. Paul's Church in view of the matter in hand. This morning, M. Gerbault (the engineer), the priests with diggers, masons, coolies and others 200 in all, with spades, pick-axes and whatever is needed to demolish walls, began to pull down the southern wall of the Vedapuri Iswaran Temple and the outhouses. At once the temple managers, Brahmins and mendicants came and told me.... Just then ... news was brought that Father Coeurdoux, the superior of St. Paul's Church, had kicked the inner shrine with his foot, and had ordered the Coffrees to remove the doors, and the Christians to break the Vahanams'..."

Pillai now went to Governor Dupliex, in an attempt to save the temple, as did the caste leaders who sought to save the temple's movable articles, but it was all to no avail.

“Then Father Coeurdoux of Karikal came with a great hammer, kicked the Lingam, broke it with his hammer, and ordered the Coffrees and the Europeans to break the images of Vishnu and the other Gods. Madame [Dupliex] went and told the priest that he might break the idols as he pleased. He answered that she had accomplished what had been impossible for fifty years, that she must be one of those Mahatmas who established this [Christian] religion in old days, and that he would publish her fame throughout the world.... Then [the native convert] Varlam also kicked the great Lingam nine or ten times with his sandals in the presence of Madame and the priest, and spat on it out of gladness, and hoping that the priest and Madame would regard him also as a Mahatma. Then he followed Madame. I can neither write nor describe what abominations were done in the temple. I know not what fruit they will reap. All the Tamils think the end of the world has come. The priests, the Tamil Christians, the Governor and his wife are more delighted than they have ever been before, but they have not yet considered what will befall them in the future.”<sup>42</sup>

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42. The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is built on or beside this temple site, and the local tradition is that the broken Lingam is hidden under an altar in the church. The Christian practice of covering a desecrated image or sacred stone with an altar is very old and churches in England, France, Italy and Spain that have been built on Pagan sites are found to contain these images and other relics.



If it took the French fifty years to destroy the Vedapuri Iswaran Temple at Pondicherry, it took the Portuguese as long or longer to bring down the Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore beach and build their St. Thomas Church in its place. They, too, would succeed because the Hindus, who had resisted them over the years, ultimately could not resist their superior European weapons and guile.

P.K. Nambiar, in *Census of India 1961*, Vol. IX, Part XI, writes, "Mylapore, which is a part of Madras city, is an ancient town. Sri Tiruvalluvar, the author of the famous *Kural* known as *Tamil Vedham*, who lived in the first century A.D.,<sup>43</sup> lived his entire life at Mylapore. Saints Sambandar and Appar have composed songs mentioning the God of Mylapore as Sri Kapaleeswara. It was a prosperous town when the English built the Fort St. George in 1593. But the present temple does not contain any feature of the Dravidian style of architecture. The carvings in the pillars are poor specimens compared with those in some of the ancient temples. When there was an erosion of the sea about the close of the last century, there was a landslip on the San Thome beach. It revealed carved stone pillars and broken stones of *mandapam* found only in Hindu temples. It is a historical fact that the Portuguese, who visited India in the 16th century, had one of their earliest settlements at San Thome, Mylapore. In those days they were very cruel and had iconoclastic

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43. Today Tamil scholars agree that Tiruvalluvar lived before the Christian era, usually placing him ca. 100 B.C.E., but some date him as early as ca. 200 B.C.E.

tendencies. They razed some Hindu temples to the ground. It is probable that the other Mylapore temple referred to in the *Thevaram* hymns was built on the seashore and that it was destroyed by the Portuguese about the beginning of the 16th century."

This is the understatement of a government historiographer writing in an official publication. M. Arunachalam, in an article in *Christianity in India: A Critical Study*, is more direct when he writes, "The Kapaleeswara Temple at Mylapore, Madras, is a standing example of Christian desecration. The great temple of Shiva at Mylapore was situated not in its present site, but at the site of the present San Thome Church even up to the end of the 16th century. It was demolished by the Portuguese vandals and their missionaries of that period, who erected their church on the site where the Hindu temple originally stood.

"Rama Raya, the Vijayanagar ruler, to save the Hindu temples, waged a war on the Portuguese in Mylapore and Goa simultaneously. The Portuguese were defeated and he took a tribute from them for their vandalism. But, when the Vijayanagar rule fell at the Battle of Talikota (1565) before the Mohammedans, the Portuguese continued their demolition work."

Rama Raya came to Mylapore in 1559, and R.S. Whiteway, in *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India*, observes that "when San Thome was held to ransom for the intolerant acts of some Jesuits and Franciscans, the Raja of Vijayanagar kept such faith with the Portuguese that, as one of them says, such humanity and justice are not to be found among Christians."

N. Murugesu Mudaliar, in *Arulmigu Kapaleeswarar Temple Mylapore*, writes, "Mylapore fell into the hands of the Portuguese in 1566, when the temple suffered demolition. The present temple was rebuilt around three hundred years ago. There are some fragmentary inscriptions from the old temple still found in the St. Thomas Cathedral." M. Arunachalam also says, "Later,

devout Hindus built the present temple of Mylapore at a different site, a few furlongs west, out of whatever they could salvage from the ruins of the old temple. A number of carved temple stones can still be seen on the compound wall of the church."

V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, quoted in *Tiru Mayil Kapaleecharam Kumbhabisheka Malar* 1982, believed that the great Shiva temple covered the area now occupied by the palace of the Roman Catholic bishop of Madras. This estate, on the south side of San Thome Cathedral, still contains scattered temple ruins and includes a museum.<sup>44</sup>

V. Balambal, in *Journal of Indian History* 1986, Vol. LXIV, Parts 1-3, writes, "According to certain Dutch sources quoted by A. Gelletti, the old town of Mylapore was demolished in 1674 by the order of the King of Golconda and was in ruins. This hypothesis is questioned as some epigraphs<sup>45</sup> specify that the old shore Temple of Kapaleeswara was demolished in the 16th century by the Portuguese and some of the ruins including a broken Vinayaka image are still seen scattered within the demesne of the Mylapore bishop's palace. It is also said that the remnants of the temple, its pillars, etc., were found immersed in the sea sixty years ago."<sup>46</sup>

Dr. R. Nagaswamy, former Director of Archaeology, Tamil Nadu Government, and present Director of the Indian Institute of Culture, Madras, in "Testimony of Religious Ethos", published

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44. This is a small building on the northeast end of the estate and is called the San Thome Cathedral Museum. It contains — or used to contain — ancient carved stones and other temple artefacts. In 1990 a friend of this writer was refused entry on three occasions, though it was then ostensibly open to the public. Since the publication of this book in 1991, it was closed and kept in an inaccessible condition, but has recently been opened again. Its contents and the carved stones lying in the estate and San Thome churchyard — which the Catholic authorities have no moral right to possess — should be removed to the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology or Madras Museum.

45. See *Annual Report on Epigraphy* 1923, Nos. 215 to 223.

46. See A.M. Paramasivanandam's *Ancient Temples of Tamilnadu*.

in *The Hindu*, Madras, on 30 April 1990, writes, "A careful study of the monuments and the lithic records in Madras reveal a great destruction caused by the Portuguese to the Hindu temples in the 16th century A.D. The most important Temple of Kapaleeswara lost all its ancient building during the Portuguese devastation and was originally located near the San Thome Cathedral. A few Chola records found in the San Thome Cathedral and Bishop's House refer to Kapaleeswara Temple and Poompavai.<sup>47</sup> A Chola record in fragment found on the east wall of the San Thome Cathedral refer to the image of Lord Nataraja of the Kapaleeswara Temple. The temple was moved to the present location in the 16th century and was probably built by one Mallappa [or Mayil Nattu Muthiyappa Mudaliar]." Later on he states, "A fragmentary inscription, 12th century Chola record in the San Thome Church region, refers to a Jain temple dedicated to Neminathaswami."

A. Ekambaranath and C.K. Sivaprakasham, in *Jain Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu*, following the Jesuit Fr. H. Hosten, describe a stone in the eastern side of the church which records in twelfth century Tamil characters a gift made to Neminathaswami by Palantipara(yan). They remark, "The existence of a Jain temple dedicated to Neminatha at Mylapore (of which San Thome is a part) is not only known from this record, but also from the Mackenzie Manuscripts, recording the transfer of a Neminatha

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47. Poompavai was the daughter of a wealthy sixth century Mylapore merchant called Siva Nesan Chettiar. He wanted to give her in marriage to the saint Jnanasambandar, but she died from snakebite before meeting him, when picking flowers for the Lord in the garden. Her father cremated her and kept the bones and ashes in a pot. When Jnanasambandar visited Mylapore, the Chettiar kept Poompavai's ashes in front of him and narrated the story of her death. Jnanasambandar responded by singing eleven songs in praise of Lord Kapaleeswara, lamenting the death of the girl at the end of each song. When he had finished, the pot of ashes burst and a twelve year old girl stepped forth. Jnanasambandar then declined to marry her, saying that she was his "daughter". Poompavai has her own shrine within the precincts of the Kapaleeswara Temple.

image from Mylapore to Chittamur, probably to protect it from destruction. Some Jain images are said to have been buried by the side of the nunnery at San Thome."

Fr. H. Hosten's testimony, in *Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore*, is interesting and worthy of review. He writes, "Fragmentary Tamil inscription of eight lines on a stone found at the cathedral, northwest end of the verandah, on the top line of the granite foundations of walls projecting from the verandah into the garden.

"When I visited Mylapore last February, 1924, the stone was still lying near the place of the find. It ought to go to the Bishop's Museum and receive an appropriate number.

"According to the Assistant Archaeological Superintendent of Epigraphs, Madras, this inscription is a fragment in Tamil and it seems to register a tax-free gift for burning at night a lamp before the image of Kuttaduvar (Nataraja) in the temple of Suramudaiyar. Palaeographically this inscription may be assigned to the 11th century A.D.

"A later communication from the Government Epigraphist for India, Fernhill, Nilgiris, says that Mr. Venkoba Rao, the Assistant Archaeological Superintendent for Epigraphy, Madras, pronounces the inscription belongs to Vikrama Chola's time (12th century) and that the gift was to the Hindu god Nataraja, whose shrine is always to be seen in a Siva temple.

"The stone was not found at its original site, as is shown by its fragmentary condition, the parts above and below, as well as right and left, being wanting. All we can gather is that the foundations in which the stone was inserted are of a date later than the inscription. To argue, as was done at the time of discovery in the *Madras Mail*, that, if the stone was dug up from any depth, it would indicate an original Saiva temple, on the ruins of which the Portuguese church of modern St. Thomas was erected, is to show a lamentable ignorance of what Marco Polo and even earlier

writers have written about St. Thomas."

The lamentable ignorance was with Fr. Hosten of course, for accepting unquestioned Marco Polo's "tall tale". He did not know that without Marco Polo there is no St. Thomas in a South Indian seashore tomb; he also did not know that all earlier accounts of the legend have St. Thomas buried on a mountain to the west of subcontinental India — in "India"-Parthia, or Edessa, or mysterious Calamina.

The writer in the *Madras Mail* was mistaken for believing that a stone dug up from a depth must be in its original position, but Fr. Hosten was mistaken for thinking that a stone is not at its original site because it is near the surface of the ground, in a newer foundation and in a fragmentary condition. The plain truth is that the stone should not have been in the church at all. Temple-breakers invariably use the rubble they have created in the new building that they put up at a site, if only because it is available and must be utilized, and it is quite reasonable to assert that if temple stones are found in the walls and foundation of San Thome Cathedral, it is because they have originated there or very near by.

Again, Fr. Hosten writes, "During the excavations made near the tomb this year (1923), when an Indian inscription was found which no one could read, one writer wrote to the *Madras Mail* to insist that the church was on the site of a Hindu fane. This writer would have been greatly puzzled if we had asked him at which time the place became Christian."

Indeed, Marco Polo would have been greatly puzzled too, had he been able to investigate the story he had heard from the Syrian Christians in Ceylon. But Fr. Hosten could not do better than follow Marco Polo blindly, and ignore the consistent and continuous claims that Hindus have made to the site since the Portuguese occupied it in the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, he is yet another Catholic scholar working within his own self-

defined "sacred space", oblivious to the established traditions and evidence around him because they are not part of his exclusive mythology and do not fit into his peculiar world view.

San Thome Cathedral and Bishop's House have been renovated and rebuilt many times over in the last hundred and fifty years, and there is a quiet effort being made by Church authorities to hide the evidence of destroyed Hindu, Jain and Buddhist<sup>48</sup> religious buildings that once occupied this sacred stretch of Mylapore seafront. The clean-up coincides with the work of resurrecting the communal Brahmin-killed-Thomas fable that was first propagated by the Portuguese — Marco Polo cannot be blamed for this story; his St. Thomas was accidentally killed by a pariah hunting peacocks.

The Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits who destroyed the temples of Goa, Kerala, Pondicherry and along the Tamil coastline, were generally more circumspect than their Muslim counterparts. They did not leave much evidence behind in the churches they built on or near temple sites. But it is also true that Indian archaeologists have not studied Christian churches as closely and in the same probing manner that they have studied mosques and other Muslim monuments. The exception are German scholars whose work on Indian churches is yet to be translated and published in English. They assert that most sixteenth and seventeenth century churches in India contain temple rubble and are built on temple sites.<sup>49</sup>

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48. Dr. Nagaswamy, in *The Hindu* article "Testimony of Religious Ethos", mentions the finding of Buddhist relics and a mutilated Buddha image in Mylapore. The Chola period image is now in the Madras Museum.

49. Many of the famous churches of Europe are built on Pagan temple sites. They include St. Peter's, Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria Rotunda (The Pantheon) in Rome, Notre Dame in Paris, and St. Paul's in London. St. Benedict built his monastery on an Apollo temple that he had destroyed himself, at Monte Cassino, Italy. The much revered Black Virgins found in churches and monasteries in Spain and Italy are images of the Egyptian Goddess Isis and Her son Horus. The list is very long.



And there is the written record, some of it couched in strange language or found in a stranger context, but easy enough to interpret once it is established that the account has not been deliberately falsified. For example, Fr. Hosten writes, "The first Portuguese historians say ... that St. Thomas built his 'house', meaning his church, on the site where a Jogi had his temple."

This is an open admission by the Portuguese that a church had been built on a temple site at Mylapore — only they have backdated the event to the first century and attributed the crime to St. Thomas. How extraordinary — or is it? The Portuguese, and Syrian Christians before them, had given the "honour" of temple-breaking to St. Thomas at Palayur, north of Cranganore, where an early seventeenth century Portuguese church built by the Jesuit Fr. James Fenicio rises amidst temple ruins today (see note 31). Fr. A. Mathias Mundadan, in *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. I, writes, "The remains of old temples found at Palayur and near the other traditional churches<sup>50</sup> are proof of this." Proof of what? Proof, it would seem, that St. Thomas destroyed temples at all the places where he is said to have built churches.

St. Thomas can be accused of many things, including crimes against women (as recorded in the *Acts of Thomas*), but he cannot be accused of destroying temples in India. This was done by his followers from about the ninth century onwards, and later by the Portuguese, and Christian historians who take the position that he did the deeds himself, citing them as "positive" proof that he came to India, cannot be taken seriously.

Dr. R. Arulappa, the former Archbishop of Madras, is one such facile scholar — and yet he has made some unusual contributions to the study of Tamil history. In his book *Punitha*

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50. These are at Maliankara, Parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Kurakonikollam in Kerala, and Tiruvithancodu in Tamil Nadu (this being the "half church", which is a converted Hindu temple).



*Thomayar* — where he tries to show that Tiruvalluvar's *Kural* is a Christian work — he mentions the finding of *yantra* stones in ancient foundations on all the sites in Madras associated with St. Thomas. He does not expand on these momentous discoveries or say where the stones are today, and it is not clear why he refers to them, but it is certainly true that the *Āgama Shāstra* requires the placing of such stones beneath the foundations of new temples before their construction begins.

The Portuguese historian Gaspar Correa, probably the most credulous annalist in history, describes extensive ruins in Mylapore and its environs including Big Mount. He attributes this devastation to the wind and rain and angry sea rather than his bigoted and iconoclastic countrymen. But at the same time he gives backhanded testimony for a Shiva temple on the Mylapore beach. In *Lendas da India*, quoted by George Mark Moraes in *A History of Christianity in India*, he writes, "On their festival days the Hindus would bring their images accompanied by large crowds and great rejoicing and would, as they approached the door of the church, lower them three times to the ground as a mark of reverence to it, a practice which had been followed from time immemorial."

The practice had indeed been followed from time immemorial, in the first Shiva temple where it originated, whose place on the beach was now usurped by the Portuguese church. The practice was to take the festival images around the temple and lower them three times to the ground, at the sanctum door before the *mūladeva*. The Hindus were continuing the ritual in the second temple, and by taking the festival images to the church on the beach were reverencing the ancient *mūlasthāna* — even if Christians and Gaspar Correa vainly thought otherwise.

R.S. Whiteway, in *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India*, writes, "[The Portuguese historians] all ... dilate on the discovery of the tomb of the Apostle Thomas at a spot near where

Madras now stands; the narrative of Correa is singularly naive, and as he was an eyewitness to some of the earlier transactions, singularly valuable. It leaves a feeling of wonder that in such an entire absence of evidence the identification of an event historical or otherwise should be thought complete."

The best evidence for a Shiva temple on the Mylapore beach is offered by the Tamil saints. Iyadigal Kadavarkon, the sixth century Shaivite prince of Kanchipuram, Jnanasambandar and Arunagirinathar, the sixth and fifteenth century Shaivite poets, consistently mention in their hymns that the Kapaleeswara Temple was on the seashore.

Jnanasambandar writes, "The Lord of Kapaleeswaram sat watching the people of Mylapore — a place full of flowering coconut palms — taking ceremonial bath in the sea on the full moon day of the month of Masai."

Nine centuries later, and one century before the arrival of the Portuguese, Arunagirinathar writes, "O Lord of Mylapore temple, situated on the shores of the sea with raging waves ..."

Both saints show in these verses that the Lord was on the seashore, and Jnanasambandar marks that He was watching His devotees in the sea — that He must have been facing east. This is not the case today. The seventeenth century Vijayanagar temple is built inland and the Lord faces west, with the all-important flag pole and image of Nandi in the western courtyard before Him. This arrangement indicates that the present temple is a second temple, as the *Āgama Shāstra* does not permit a temple that has been moved from its original site and rebuilt to face in the same direction as its predecessor.

Neither Jnanasambandar nor Arunagirinathar had reason to sing of the Lord by the sea if He was not there. Their testimony is impeccable and by itself destroys the argument for a seashore tomb of St. Thomas.

If St. Thomas was a carpenter slave, then Diogo Fernandez is the gentleman architect who laid the foundation stone for his church on the Mylapore beach. He was Albuquerque's attendant at Goa and is described by N. Figuerdo, in *St. Thomas the Apostle in Mylapore*, as "a virtuous old man of good conduct". Very probably he was — so long as the virtue did not interfere with the demands of his Roman Catholic faith. He arrived at Mylapore in 1517 in the company of some wealthy Armenian merchants who were coming from Malacca. They knew Marco Polo's story and knew, too, that the "Thomas" revered by Syrian Christians at Mylapore was not a martyr. This was not a very satisfactory circumstance for them or the Portuguese. Their passionate nature and martyrolatrous religion required a sacrifice.<sup>51</sup> All the apostles had suffered martyrdom except St. John,<sup>52</sup> and St. Thomas was

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51. The central rite of Christian worship is the Eucharist (from the Greek for "thanksgiving"). It is considered to be a real sacrifice in which the body and blood of Jesus, under the appearances of bread and wine, are offered to God. The flesh and blood are then consumed by the congregation as an act of communion with Jesus. In the Middle Ages the ceremony was called "eating the Baby". Christianity is the only world religion that practices ritual cannibalism.

52. There is a story that St. John was boiled in oil at Rome but survived the ordeal. Another story tells of how he was poisoned, and a painting in the Portuguese church on St. Thomas Mount shows him with a poisoned chalice. He probably spent his last years at Ephesus and died there of old age. Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, writes, "The total disregard of truth and probability in the representation of the primitive martyrdoms was occasioned by a very natural mistake. The ecclesiastical writers of the fourth and fifth centuries ascribe to the magistrates of Rome the same degree of implacable and unrelenting zeal which filled their own breasts against the heretics and idolators of their own times.... The learned Origen, who, from his experience as well as readings, was intimately acquainted with the history

not going to get away with an accidental death in Portuguese territory. Moreover, if the Portuguese knew Marco Polo's story, they knew better the Latin fables *Passio Thomae* and *De Miraculis Thomae*, which had been circulating in Europe for a thousand years. Both legends deviated from the *Acts of Thomas*, in which St. Thomas had been executed by king's men with spears, and described his death as being at the hands of a Pagan priest of the Sun — or Zoroastrian — who, in one, had stabbed him with a lance, and in the other, with a sword. The Portuguese preferred *De Miraculis Thomae*, in which the priest used a lance, and had the romance published in Portugal in 1531 and 1552 to substantiate the "discovery" they had made at Mylapore in 1523. It did not matter to them that this European story, too, had St. Thomas buried on a mountain, while they had in their possession only a seashore tomb.

Earlier, in 1521-22, the Portuguese had opened two tombs in the Shiva temple's northern precincts. One tomb contained a "black" skeleton, which, according to its inscription, belonged to a Chola king. The Portuguese nevertheless "identified" him as being a disciple of St. Thomas. The second tomb revealed a "white" skeleton, which, naturally, "belonged" to the white Jew Thomas. This second skeleton was sent to Goa for verification — where it languishes till today, unsung and unrecognised.

As these diggings did not produce the required result, Diogo Fernandez was asked, in 1523, to excavate a third tomb which lay partly under the foundation of a dilapidated building that had been occupied by the Portuguese. He refused at first but was persuaded by the attending priest, Fr. Antonio Gil, who heard his confession and that of the two men, Braz Fernandez and Diogo

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of the Christians, declares, in the most express terms, that the number of martyrs was very inconsiderable. His authority would alone be sufficient to annihilate that formidable army of martyrs, whose relics, drawn for the most part from the catacombs of Rome, have replenished so many churches, and whose achievements have been the subject of so many volumes of holy romances ..."

Lourenco, who would assist him in the pious enterprise. They then began the excavation of a deep and elaborate, and very much empty, tomb. It was Saturday afternoon, and they continued the work into the late evening, when, on the suggestion of Diogo Fernandez, they abandoned their unproductive labours and retired for the night. The excavation was left open and unattended until the next morning, a Sunday, when the men began digging again. It was not long now before the grave disgorged bones that were "much worn out", portions of skull and spine, and a clay pot of earth "bedewed with blood", with a thigh bone in it, and hidden in the red earth an iron Malabar spearhead shaped like an olive leaf, which, after fifteen Christian centuries, still had a piece of wooden shaft miraculously preserved in its socket.<sup>53</sup>

The bones of "St. Thomas" were collected — there was no doubt this time in the Portuguese mind that they were his — and later, with due ceremony, placed in a Chinese coffer with silver locks, along with the bones of the Chola king, another "disciple" whose remains had been found nearby, and those of two children. The key to the coffer was then sent to the Viceroy at Goa, but two years later Fr. Penteado broke the locks as he felt that the bones were in a poor condition and needed attention. He transferred them to a wooden chest and hid this in a place known only to himself and Rodrigo Alvares. The chest was then presumed to be lost, and, in 1530, a new search was mounted for the relics. Diogo Fernandez was again called in and through his intercession with Rodrigo Alvares, the chest was found in a decayed condition under the main altar of the church — for a small church, the first Christian church to rise on the Mylapore

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53. The relics "discovered" by Diogo Fernandez were located at a depth of 15'2" and though the tomb was on high ground — the only high ground on this stretch of seabeach, which is why temples were built on it — the possibility of it being damp or seeping water during the monsoon must be considered along with many other geological and topographical factors.

beach, had been built, in 1523, by Augustinian friars beside the newly found "St. Thomas" tomb.

Fr. Hosten, in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1923, writes, "If what the Portuguese found at Mylapore in 152[3] in a tomb ... was not part of St. Thomas's body, then the whole connection with St. Thomas seems to be lost."

Fr. Hosten would come to accept the story that St. Thomas had come to South India, but not on the evidence of the excavations made by himself or the Portuguese. He was persuaded, like other Catholic scholars, by the spurious *St. Thomas Song* or *Rabban Pattu* that had been composed by Varghese Palayur in 1892 and published in 1916 by Fr. Bernard of Travancore.

Fr. Heras, former Director of the Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay, who had said in 1953 that he was convinced that the tomb of St. Thomas was not in Mylapore, had said earlier and emphatically, in *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, that the Portuguese account of their discovery of some relics was "a most barefaced imposture [with] all elements of a forgery."

This is certainly true and it is one of the wonders of modern Catholic scholarship that the depositions of Diogo Fernandez made in 1533 and 1543 are accepted as authentic — especially as they include a most fanciful christianized history of Mylapore from before the time of the Portuguese.

St. Francis Xavier visited Mylapore in 1545 and had nothing to say about Diogo Fernandez's report, which he read, or the relics and tomb which he prayed before. Yet his Jesuit biographer, Fr. Georg Schurhammer, strictly adhering to the Jesuit discipline of specious reasoning (and criticizing Fr. Heras for not doing so), treats both the relics and reports as authentic in his *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*.

But if for the sake of argument it is agreed that the depositions of Diogo Fernandez are not fabricated — he could have

been an uninformed witness to the “discovery” (though it is very unlikely) — then it must be said that the relics themselves most certainly are, in keeping with the ancient tradition of fraud so dear to the Church.<sup>54</sup> Ved Prakash, in *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai*, shows that the relics were produced out of materials brought from Goa and then planted in the empty tomb. He also shows that the Portuguese reworked the existing Syrian Christian version of the myth, changing the Syriac *be ruhme*, meaning “by spear”, to read *Brahmins* in order to implicate Brahmins in the apostle’s murder. The Malabar tradition was thus brought into line with the European romance, *De Miraculis Thomae*, where St. Thomas is killed by a Pagan priest with a lance — though the contradiction of lance in the story and spear-head in the reliquary remains today.

The question of whether the Portuguese relics are genuine or not — and whether the South Indian legend is history or not — will be conclusively answered as soon as the Archbishop of Madras gives them to independent forensic experts for testing. But he may be also aware that such a gesture would be redundant, as all of the bones of St. Thomas were resting in the cathedral at Ortona, Italy, while Diogo Fernandez was digging for them in Mylapore. They had been there since 1258, and before that at Chios, Greece, and Edessa, and in 1566 the Bishop of Ortona had issued a Deed of Verification for these bones, which, in itself, proves that the bones produced by the Portuguese out of the Mylapore tomb cannot possibly be

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54. Fabricating religious relics is as old a tradition in the Roman Catholic Church as forging documents. The most famous faked relic is the Shroud of Turin, alleged burial cloth of Jesus, but the most lucrative faked relic is the chain that allegedly bound St. Peter in prison, the iron filings of which the popes used to sell to kings and wealthy believers for a large fee. (Perhaps more curious than the chain itself is that a photograph of it appeared in the Jayanti 1992 issue of *The Mountain Path*, the official organ of Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai, after its pious editor had returned from a pilgrimage to Rome.)



those of St. Thomas.<sup>55</sup>

The Portuguese themselves appear to have treated this "momentous discovery" in a cavalier fashion, which is why the relics got lost in 1525. When they were located again, in 1530, the bones and spearhead — shaped like an olive leaf, though there are no olive trees in India — were transferred to a small box, locked up in a chapel in the church, and the key kept by the pastor.

This church, originally built in 1523 and called San Thome or San Thome de Meliapore, was subsequently enlarged and extended, and the encroachment on the Kapaleeswara Temple began in earnest. The Christians had done this before, building a church against a temple and then taking over the temple, and that the Shiva temple survived as long as it did, up to 1566 according to some authorities, is grand testimony to the patient and courageous resistance the Hindus of Mylapore had put up against this ruthless Catholic power.

In 1606 the Pope, at the request of the King of Portugal, made San Thome de Meliapore into a diocese independent of Goa. The church was extended again and became the seat of a bishop, but, in 1893, this building was demolished by the bishop and the present Gothic cathedral put up in its place. It was completed and consecrated in 1896. In 1952 the archdiocese of Madras and Mylapore was constituted, and in 1956, after much lobbying by the Indian hierarchy, Pope Pius XII raised the status of San Thome to that of a minor basilica. This church dignity is of no consequence but it affords the archbishop some minor liturgical privileges.

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55. It is said that the bones were transferred from "India" to Edessa between 222 C.E. and 235 C.E. (according to the *Acts*, all of the bones were transferred to Mesopotamia within the lifetime of King Mazdai), from Edessa to Chios in 1144, and from Chios to Ortona in 1258. The bones probably originated at Edessa; but in any case *all* of the skull was at Ortona in 1566 when the bishop issued his deed, so there could not have been any skull bone at Mylapore for the Portuguese to find in 1523. The same is true of the other bones, though they, unlike the skull, are not specifically mentioned in the deed.

Diogo Fernandez's "St. Thomas" relics still remain in the church today. The iron spearhead and piece of skull are kept in a monstrance, along with the relics of St. Francis Xavier, St. Isabella, St. Vincentio and the Martyrs of Morocco. The first "St. Thomas" tomb, which contained the "white" skeleton that was sent to Goa, is empty and ignored, but the second "St. Thomas" tomb is pointed out to pilgrims and tourists. It contains the remainder of Diogo Fernandez's "findings", the pieces of spine and thigh bone, and, presumably, the pot of "blood-bcdewed" earth.

Yet this is not the end of the bones at San Thome. The cathedral also has in its possession a piece of Church-certified Ortona bone, which it obtained from Cardinal Tisserant in 1953, after he had deposited the apostle's right arm at Kodungallur. The pastor of San Thome can now say with some pride that he is the keeper of a real St. Thomas bone — keeping in mind that the acceptance of the Ortona gift is also an admission that the Portuguese relics in his care are not those of St. Thomas.

There are four places in Madras and its environs, other than San Thome, that the Portuguese associated with St. Thomas. The first is a rocky hillock called Little Mount, four miles southwest of Mylapore, on the south bank of the Adyar at Saidapet. Fr. Herman D'Souza, in *In the Steps of St. Thomas*, writes, "Hoary tradition among Catholics and non-Catholics ... proudly holds that this part of [Madras] extended shelter to the Apostle, when the ministers of the local king, Mahadevan, were out to murder him.... The favourite of the king, Thomas was ever in danger of losing his precious life — thanks to the scheming ministers whipped up by Hindu priests.... There is a version that the Apostle was actually handled brutally more than once in his apartment, in the absence of the king. In order to save his life for yet a little while for the greater glory of God, Thomas is reported to have sought refuge in the jungle of Little Mount."

This sly communal tale, invented by Jesuits and improved on by Fr. D'Souza, is peculiar to Madras. He tries to establish Hindu support for the story, by quoting Hindu publications that repeat it. But Hindu traditions about Little Mount and the other "St. Thomas" sites are quite different and much older than those of the Portuguese.<sup>56</sup> They believe that the hillock, with its cave and spring and imprint of peacock's feet in the rock, was sacred to Murugan, and Hindu women used to visit the site even after

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56. If independent scholars ever make an objective study of the St. Thomas tradition in Madras and the Portuguese sites associated with it, they will have to take into consideration the older and more weighty Hindu traditions associated with the same sites.

the Portuguese had cleared it of shrines. In 1551, a church was built by the cave, called Our Lady of Health, and the Jesuits built a second church by the spring. Nothing remains of these buildings today, and the archaeological evidence on the site was destroyed years ago when it was blasted to make way for the modern church that now stands there.

St. Thomas had to leave Little Mount when the king's men found him in the cave. He fled to Big Mount, two miles further south, by a secret underground passage. But Big Mount did not offer refuge either. Fr. D'Souza writes, "His murderers sought him there and were on the point of seizing him. How long St. Thomas made his abode on the top of the hill, one cannot say. Unbroken tradition maintains that while the Apostle was praying before the cross carved by him on a stone, an assassin suborned by King Mahadevan's priest and ministers, crept up stealthily and pierced him with a lance from behind. Thereupon the Apostle is reported to have fallen on the stone cross and embraced it; his blood crimsoned the stone cross and the space around. Thus did he seal his Apostolate with his blood, even as the other Apostles, save St. John.... His disciples took his body to [Mylapore] ... and interred it at his dear old place, about the year A.D. 68."

This rendition of the fable has no equivalent in Malabar and no relationship to the account in the *Acts of Thomas*, though it does have in it the priest and lance found in the Portuguese *De Miraculis Thomae*. There is no record that Mylapore had a temporal king of any name in 68 C.E. — the date first appeared on a memorial plaque in San Thome Cathedral in the eighteenth century and was afterwards incorporated into the story. But as is the case with many historical fabrications, it contains an element of truth and this gives the fictional parts credibility. Mahadevan is a reference to Lord Shiva, who was of course the King of Mylapore in the first century C.E., even as He is today.

Dr. R. Arulappa, in *Punitha Thomayar*, asserts that Big

Mount was originally called Bhrigu Malai and was the seat of the Hindu sage Bhrigu Rishi until St. Thomas came and chased him away. This story, like the one above, is another piece of fiction that has at its core a little truth. The hill was not sacred to Bhrigu Rishi but to Perumal, as the Tamils call Lord Vishnu, and it is the Portuguese who chased the "rishi" away, not St. Thomas. The temple was destroyed around 1545, when they gained effective control of the hill, which was the highest in the area and the southern limit of their territory. Portuguese historians describe it as being crowded with ruins then, and broken temple stones can still be found on its slopes, on the south and west side.

The Portuguese had begun to settle around Big Mount as early as 1523 — the same year they "discovered" the tomb of "St. Thomas" — and one of the first to take up residence there was Diogo Fernandez. He would succeed in erecting a small chapel on the hill before 1545, but the construction of the church, called Our Lady of Expectation, did not commence until 1547. It was built on the east-west alignment of the temple foundation — the ancient granite base of the flag pole is on the eastern side of the church — but the Portuguese reversed this order in keeping with established Christian practice when building on a Pagan site, and the church entrance is on the western side. In 1707, the building was extended by an Armenian merchant and the royal arms of Portugal were added to the facade of the main porch.

It was when clearing the rubble for the church, in 1547, that the Portuguese "discovered" the famous Persian "St. Thomas" cross in the temple foundation. Diogo Fernandez is not implicated in this fraud, but the Vicar of San Thome, Fr. Gaspar Coelho, and the Captain of the Coromandel, Gabriel de Athaide, are, as the construction was under their direct supervision. What is known for certain is that St. Thomas did not carve this cross — it is dated to the eighth century, like its counterparts in Kerala — and as a cross it did not originate on Big Mount (see pages

47 and 48). It was kept inside the church behind the altar, and used to "bleed" at irregular intervals up to 1704. This phenomenon stopped as soon as the sensible and schismatic British began to move into the area and build a cantonment.

The other "St. Thomas" relic in the church is a brightly coloured icon of Mary and the child Jesus. It is said to have been painted by St. Luke<sup>57</sup> and brought to India by St. Thomas, who wore it on his breast as a scapular or badge of mission. In fact, it does not appear in Portuguese records until 1559, and the diverse stories that go with it were invented after this date.

The church also has paintings of St. Thomas and his Hindu assassin. One of them, on the reredos of the altar, depicts an Iyengar Brahmin with *nāmam*, about to stab the praying apostle from behind. It defeats its purpose inasmuch as Vaishnavas did not wear *nāmam*, the U-shaped forehead mark, until after Ramanuja introduced it in the eleventh century. The other painting, very large and part of a series of the apostles and their various modes of death, shows St. Thomas with a book, a lance, and his sturdy Hindu assassin, who, this time, does not wear sectarian marks or orthodox dress.

The next place in Madras associated with St. Thomas is the Descanco Church in Mylapore, which was built by the Madeiros family to mark the place where story says St. Thomas rested on his daily march between the Mylapore beach and Little Mount. It is the last church the Portuguese raised in Madras and of a later date and lesser importance than the others.

And finally there is Luz Church, the first church the Portu-

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57. There are seven of these icons by "St. Luke" scattered around the world. The most famous one hangs in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which was built by Pope Sixtus III in 432 C.E. after he had demolished the Temple of Cybele on the Esquiline Hill. He had hoped to wean the women of Rome away from their favorite Goddess and substitute Her worship with that of the Virgin Mary. Most psychologists think that he failed miserably, and not long ago Pope John Paul II published a diatribe against those American and European women who continue to worship the Great Mother.

guese would build in Mylapore and possibly the oldest standing Portuguese church on the Tamil coastline. It, too, is built on temple ruins, according to A.S.I. records, and was raised in 1516 by the Franciscan missionary priest Pedro da Atongia. The Catholic fortnightly *Madras Musings* says, "But with the Portuguese only occasional visitors to this coast from 1509 and settlers only from 1522, the dates on the stone plaque and above the church's entrance seem more likely the date of the establishment of a shrine in the 'grove of Thomas' than the date of the surviving building."

Yes, indeed — but the "grove of Thomas" once contained a "pool of Vishnu". What happened to it in 1516?

*Madras Musings* is edited by the accomplished St. Thomas apologist S. Muthiah, who is also a director at T.T. Maps and Publications Ltd., the T.T.K. company that produces and sells the St. Thomas fable to unwitting tourists. He admits that there is no historical evidence for the alleged visit of St. Thomas to India, but will follow this statement up with another about India's "1800-year-old, and possibly older, Christian tradition."

Muthiah's allusion is to Pantaenus the Alexandrian, who is said to have visited "the land of the Indians" before 190 C.E. The first reference is made by Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, which others follow, but Dr. A. Mingana, an authority on the spread of Christianity in India, quoted by C.B. Firth in *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, asserts, "... the India they refer to is without doubt Arabia Felix. The fact has been recognised by all historians since Assemani and Tillemont, and has been considered as established even by such a conservative writer as Medleycott. It will be a matter of surprise if any responsible author will mention in the future Pantaenus in connection with India proper."

But ancient history — whether tucked away in the Cairo Museum or Vatican Library — is not Muthiah's first line of defence. He prefers to use emotional tactics when dealing with unbelievers, and declares through his amanuensis in a *Madras Musings* editorial that, "Christian tradition, as much an article of faith, has Thomas who Doubted, the Apostle of India, living and preaching in this part of the Coromandel from about 65 A.D. till



his death in 72 A.D.”<sup>58</sup>

This “Apostle of India” tradition is not an “article of faith” for Christians of course.<sup>59</sup> Protestants reject it outright as a Catholic superstition, and Catholics themselves are not obliged to accept it. This point is clarified by Papal Chevalier F.A. D’Cruz, in *St. Thomas the Apostle in India*, when he discusses the belief in the “St. Thomas” relics and tomb in San Thome Cathedral. He writes, “Catholics who venerate the tomb are not compelled to believe in its genuineness; and they know well that it is a question of evidence and that they may be mistaken as to the fact. They regard it, in any case, in the light of a memorial, whereby the saint is remembered and honoured. If miracles are said to have occurred in connection with the reputed tomb or relics, Catholics understand again here also it is a question of evidence and that, if genuine, they are the result of faith excited by the memorial of the saint whose intercession had been implored by clients for Divine interposition on their behalf.”

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58. See pages 225 to 227 for the editorial and our reply to it.

59. According to *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, an “article of faith” is by definition a “condition or stipulation of a religious creed”.

There are six tombs for St. Thomas in South India. Two are in San Thome Cathedral at Mylapore, a third on an island southwest of Cochin, a fourth in a Syrian church at Tiruvancode in Travancore, a fifth in a Shiva temple at Malayattur in Travancore, and a sixth at Kalayamuthur west of Madurai near the Palani Hills. There are also six tombs for St. Thomas abroad. One is in Brazil, a second in Germany, a third in Japan, a fourth in Malacca, a fifth in Tibet, and a sixth in China.

But this is not the end of the matter of tombs. Bardesanes's *Acts of Thomas* has St. Thomas buried in a royal tomb on a mountain in King Mazdai's desert country and the Ethiopian version of the same *Acts* has the tomb located in Qantaria, which some say is ancient Gandhara in Afghanistan. The Alexandrian doctors say the tomb is in Parthia that is Persia, but Antipope Hippolytus of Portus says it is in Calamina, a city much discussed and never found, and which, today, remains as elusive a place as the Elioforum of the *Passio Thomae*. Still others say the tomb is in Betumah, which the Syrians identify with Mylapore but the Arabs say is east of Cape Comorin and Colonel Gerini, in *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia*, says is east of Singapore. This is still not the end of the tombs for St. Thomas, but we will stop with the Codex Fuldensis of the Latin version of Tatian's Syriac *Diatessaron*, ca. 150 C.E., which says, "Thomas — In India — Civitate Iothabis".

Now Iothabis is Iotha, which is a spelling mistake for Iorha, which is Latin for Urha the Syriac name for Edessa, which, finally, is modern Urfa in Turkey. Edessa as the burial place of

St. Thomas can be considered seriously. It is here and in Persia that he proselytized the Syrians, and it is here that the Syrian Christians, known to Europeans as Nestorians, would flourish and spread eastwards after the sixth century even up to Kubli Khan's court in China. The Latin version of the *Diatessaron* places Edessa in India because "India" was the term that ancient geographers used to designate the lands east and south of the Roman Empire's frontiers.

Marco Polo is the first storyteller to place the tomb of St. Thomas in South India and a village on the Coromandel Coast. He does not name the village nor did he visit it, yet most of his interpreters will identify the village with Mylapore. T.K. Joseph, author of *Six St. Thomases of South India*, accepts Marco Polo's story but believes that the identification of the tomb in Mylapore as a Christian tomb is a case of wrong identification, of the Syrian Christians identifying the tomb of a Muslim Thomas with their Christian Thomas. In fact, the Mylapore tomb is a Portuguese fake, and the early Syrian Christians were probably worshipping in the great Shiva temple itself or at a yogi's *samādhi* connected with it.

Be this as it may, when asked to explain how the South Indian tradition of St. Thomas arose, T.K. Joseph replies, "There are many such problems to be solved. For instance, how was St. Thomas located in Brazil, Germany, Tibet, Malacca, Japan, China, etc.? How have his footprints, kneemarks, fingermarks, mummies, three skeletons, more than half-a-dozen tombs, etc., been found in Asia?... How were the seven dates (A.D. 50, 51, etc.) for his landing first in South India, and the ten or eleven dates for his death (as non-martyr or martyr) fabricated in South India after 1500 A.D.? How was he made to land first in Malliankara, or Cranganore, or Mylapore, diversely? How was the *Rampan Song* about him composed 'in 1601 A.D.' as quite reliable, and then tampered with in 1952? How has elephantiasis

in Cochin been connected with St. Thomas?

"How, again, has Jesus Christ been found sojourning in North India and the South of England? How has his sepulchre been found in Kashmir?

"Again, how did the Ceylon tradition arise that on 'Adam's Peak' there, 'is the sepulchre of Adam, our first parent', as Marco Polo recorded? How has another tomb of the same Adam been located in Arabia?... How has Ceylon found in it the Buddha's, Adam's and St. Thomas's footprints? How were 'Indians' found in America by the first Europeans who reached it?"

This rhetoric is all very well insofar as it goes, but it does not go far enough and T.K. Joseph admits the lacuna when he uses phrases like "fabricated in South India after 1500 A.D." and "tampered with in 1952" in his discourse. Unfortunately for history, and especially the study of Indian history, he is unwilling to openly indict the Portuguese and the popes and the Roman Catholic Church of today, though he could do so with effect as he had access to information and documents that we cannot hope to obtain.

T.K. Joseph's weakness — like that of other honest Christian scholars — is inhibition and a limited perspective. He treats the problem of St. Thomas as an internal matter of the Christian community rather than a problem of Indian history. He refuses to consider the Hindu side of the story or to admit that temples were destroyed in Mylapore in the sixteenth century by Franciscan monks and Jesuit priests. He rejects the Malabar and Mylapore legends of St. Thomas as inventions, but seems to be unaware that Marco Polo's "tall tale" is also that — a tall tale of St. Thomas picked up in a Ceylonese port bazaar and retold with additions to an eager Italian public. His acceptance of the geographical designation "India" in the *Acts of Thomas*, as the field of the apostle's work, is unreasonable, as the internal cultural evidence of the *Acts* points to West Asia and not North-West

India. He admits that he is forced to accept the testimony of the *Acts* as it is the only ancient document that says St. Thomas came to India — and he believes that St. Thomas did come to North-West India and may have been first buried near ancient Taxila.

T.K. Joseph — and other Christian scholars who depend on the *Acts of Thomas* to fulfil their St. Thomas desires — seem to be unaware of Thomas Paine's famous dictum concerning another collection of acts and gospels — the *Bible*. Paine said, "It has often been said that anything may be proved from the Bible; but before anything can be admitted as proved by the Bible, the Bible itself must be proved to be true; for if the Bible be not true, or the truth of it doubtful, it ceases to have authority, and cannot be admitted as proof of anything."

The Rev. Dr. G. Milne Rae, author of *The Syrian Church in India*, was even more unsparing than T.K. Joseph in his criticism of the St. Thomas fable. He did not allow that St. Thomas came further east than Afghanistan, and told the Syrian Christians that they reasoned fallaciously about their identity and "wove a fictitious story of their origin". The two "facts" that they worked from, he said, were (1) the ancient beliefs of their church that St. Thomas was the apostle of the Indians, and (2) that they were Christians of St. Thomas. The ratiocination of these points went like this: St. Thomas was the apostle of the Indians; we are Indians; therefore he is our apostle. If this is not proof enough, there is his tomb in Mylapore, and we have been called "St. Thomas" Christians from the first century.<sup>60</sup>

On the first point, the ancient beliefs of the Syrian Church, however dear to Syrian Christians, cannot be admitted as evidence

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60. Christians love reasonings of this nature because they cannot be disproved by the uninformed man in the street. They are usually based on a false premise and employ an intoxicating circular logic, where the last statement is made to prove the first statement and so on until the listener, usually a polite Hindu, is "convinced" or "defeated".

until they are proved to be historically true. This has not yet happened, though men of genius and integrity have worked at the problem for centuries. The second point, which is simply repeated twice or thrice in the reasoning, also cannot be admitted as evidence because there is no record — indeed, no tradition — of any group calling themselves “St. Thomas” Christians prior to the fourteenth century.

Bishop Giovanni dei Marignolli, the Franciscan papal legate who built a Roman Catholic church in Quilon, in 1348, is the first person to use the appellation “St. Thomas” Christians. He did this to distinguish Syrian converts from low-caste Hindu converts in his congregation. This allowed the former Nestorians to retain their caste status as Roman Catholics. The appellation “St. Thomas” Christian is thus of Roman Catholic origin and indicates a social division within the Roman Catholic Church.

This observation does not exclude the probability that the Syrian Christians, within a few generations of their arrival in India from Persia in the fourth century, identified their community patriarch Thomas the Merchant with their spiritual patriarch Thomas the Apostle — especially as both were also called Thomas of Jerusalem. Thomas had evangelized their forefathers in Syria and Persia and was their apostle, but this did not make him India’s apostle any more than Moses was India’s prophet, though he was the spiritual patriarch of another immigrant community in Malabar.

Moreover, there is no evidence that there ever was a Church of India, as such an early Thomas-founded church would have been called, though there was admittedly a Church of Persia founded by St. Thomas. Nor is there any record that Malabar ever had its own ecclesiastical hierarchy; hierarchs were always brought into India from Persia or Mesopotamia.

This circumstance is very unusual, for if the Syrian Church was not an immigrant church as its name and the importation of

bishops implies, and St. Thomas was as closely and indissolubly associated with India as legend says, then there should be a Church of India — or some concrete record of it — with an indigenous hierarchy and an apostolic succession of bishops from St. Thomas. Yet there is nothing, absolutely nothing to show that St. Thomas established a church in India — notwithstanding the reams of reasonings and professions of faith that “St. Thomas” Christians produce today.

We have only the many and various legends<sup>61</sup> and even they continue to change with the changing political needs of the Church. T.K. Joseph, the “St. Thomas” Christian who began his investigation into the St. Thomas legend when he suspected the authority of Malabar’s “authoritative” *St. Thomas Song*, writes, “St. Thomas Christians seem to be ready to welcome any number of additions to their [Marco Polo] recorded St. Thomas traditions of 1288 to the present day if the fundamental concept of St. Thomas’s *preaching and death in their South India* itself is left intact. They do not mind if he is a non-martyr or a martyr, and do not seem to care if they or their ancestors are accused of sins committed for his sake, or if the Saint himself is described in their records as having ... sinned. They will perhaps readily accept his Ceylon log of wood, his three skeletons, his two Mylapore tombs, his footprints on rocks, his dates 52, 68 A.D., etc., his [non-existent] contemporary *Biography* of 72-73 A.D., his waist cord presented to him by St. Mary on her ‘Assumption’ to heaven, his coming to South India along with King Gaspar of Jaffna, his settling the Goddess Kali in the Cranganore temple,<sup>62</sup> his withdrawing his dead hand from Chinese intruders to his

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61. There are at least six different root legends — from Alexandria, Edessa, Europe, Venice (Marco Polo), Malabar and Mylapore — that Catholic propagandists draw on to make up their own *masala* stories of St. Thomas.

62. This is another temple which St. Thomas is said to have demolished, though it continues to prosper today as the fierce and famous Bhagawati of Kodungallur.

tomb in Mylapore, and other such things of the kind.”

This short list of St. Thomas curiosities contains an error and an important omission. The error is that Catholics will not tolerate a non-martyred apostle in their pantheon of saints — they have even martyred St. John, who was never martyred — and the omission is that T.K. Joseph has neglected to mention that Catholics like to believe that St. Thomas was killed by a Brahmin.

The “martyred” St. Thomas has existed since the *Acts of Thomas*, ca. 210 C.E., in which he is executed by King Mazdai for social crimes and sorcery. The Portuguese added the Brahmin assassin after 1517 and he has remained the first choice of the Roman Catholic Church since, for without him the Hindu community cannot be successfully maligned and the continuing cover-up of the destruction of temples in Mylapore cannot be successfully maintained.



Where, then, is the tomb of St. Thomas if the two in Mylapore are Portuguese fakes? Where did he experience his passion and seal his mission with blood if not in India? We do not know the answer to these questions, but there is a verse in an ancient St. Thomas hymn<sup>63</sup> which says:

Thou despisest error;  
Thou destroyest unbelievers:  
For, in the city where thou truly liest,  
There never lives any of the heretics,  
Jews, or Pagans.

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63. The hymn in Latin is earlier than the ninth century and is reproduced by Mgr. Zaleski in the Belgian Jesuit review *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. 6, 1887.

Most ethnic and religious communities localise their myths of origin when they migrate to new lands and establish themselves there permanently. This is part of the psychological process of becoming a native. The tradition they bring from abroad is altered enough to identify its main themes and characters with local places. Time does the rest and the second and third generation soon forget the original story and its foreign locales. Inter-community relationships will mix in local legends with the imported myth. In the case of the Syrian Christians, the process was irresistible because the charismatic, semi-legendary Thomas of Cana, who led the first Christians to Malabar from Persia and Mesopotamia in 345 C.E., was not really any different a community hero than the charismatic, semi-legendary Thomas the Apostle. The fact that both leaders were also known as Thomas of Jerusalem would have made the identification of the fourth century merchant with the first century saint inevitable.

None of this would amount to anything more than a sociological curiosity except that the Syrian Christian tradition of St. Thomas became the property of the Portuguese and the Roman Catholic Church. Both imperialist powers needed more than anything else in their ideological arsenals this emotionally-charged fable to legitimize their presence in India.

T.G. Percival Spear, author of *India: A Modern History* and co-author of the *Oxford History of India*, commenting on the Portuguese in India in an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, writes, "The Portuguese early considered that no faith need be kept with an infidel, and to this policy of perfidy they added a

tendency to cruelty beyond the normal limits of a very rough age; the result was to deprive them of Indian sympathy. In religion the Portuguese were distinguished by missionary fervour and intolerance.... Of the latter, there was the Inquisition of Goa and the forcible subjection of the Syrian church to Rome at the Synod of Diamper in 1599."

The Synod of Diamper was followed by the burning of Syrian books by Archbishop Menezes of Goa, and the myth of St. Thomas, now firmly in the hands of the Church, took on a marked anti-Hindu character. But Roman Catholic bigotry was universal — and continues. Percival Spear observes, "Then came Roman Catholicism, which today has perhaps 5,000,000 followers and an array of churches, convents, and colleges all over India. A by-product has been a tradition of intolerance, which still lingers."

This last remark is a serious indictment of Indian Christianity, coming as it does from a reputed Cambridge historian, and it probably has not been made about any other modern religious community in the whole *Encyclopaedia*.

Christians have always capitalized on the established tradition that they have been persecuted, but the plain truth is that they have done most of the persecuting in recorded history and this started in earnest when they obtained political power in Rome in the fourth century (see note 15). If they attracted persecution before this time from the Pagan emperors, it was exactly because of their religious intolerance.

Arthur Frederick Ide, in *Unzipped: The Popes Bare All*, writes, "One primary reason Rome turned against the Christians was the Christians were violently intolerant. Christians would not accept altars to gods other than their own even though the Romans offered an altar to the Christian god. Christians spat upon those who would not convert. They hid documents. They alienated families. They prayed for the end of the empire and the

enthronement of their god as the new king. These were actions which were socially disconcerting, disrupting, and dangerous.

"Contrary to the Christian apologist Justin, the Christians were not dispatched from this life because they were Christians. Christians were executed only after their *actions* (not their beliefs) were seen as riot-inducing, treasonous, and detrimental to the family unit, and especially dangerous to the children."

Christians have never been persecuted in India by Hindus,<sup>64</sup> and their deeply resented and often disruptive socio-political activity, religious conversion, is protected by the Constitution. Yet this coddling and a long list of other official favours has not made Indian Christians any more tolerant today than their Mediterranean counterparts were in the fourth century.<sup>65</sup>

Percival Spear's remark about a "tradition of intolerance" is unfortunately true of Christianity itself. Jesus was the first religious teacher in history to threaten those who did not agree with him with eternal damnation. This is the only original idea that he contributed to the world's vast body of religious thought, and in two millennia it has destroyed nations and whole civilizations and caused Thomas Jefferson to declare, "The Christian God is cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust."

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64. The seventeenth century Jesuit missionary John de Britto was executed by the Raja of Ramnad for breaking the law. He had been repeatedly warned to stop his antisocial activities and stay out of the principality. Instead, he carefully planned his "martyrdom" and went to great lengths to provoke the Raja. He was canonised in 1947 by a Vatican decree.

65. On April 7, 1994, the *Indian Express* reported an assault on a prominent Madras social worker, S. Vidyakar, by a Christian family who lived next door to one of his houses for destitute women and children. Vidyakar states, "For some time now our social worker, Sundari, was being teased and taunted by some members of the family." Sundari adds, "They are Christians and start clapping and dancing whenever we sing [devotional songs] and taunt us about worshipping [stone]. When things went a little too far that evening and I was abused in filthy language, I called up Vidyakar and gave him details." Vidyakar went to talk to the family the next day, but they attacked him with a log and broke his arm.

None of our brown sahibs and learned secular scribes are interested in this discourse. They are bored by it, or embarrassed, and if they have bothered to read it they will have decided that we are a rabid communalist who hates Christians. They have been fed on the milksops of a sentimental christology in their convent schools and Jesuit colleges and it has made them impotent. They are not able to measure Christian cult theory and practice against the rigorous standards set by their own Dharma. They are also on the defensive, having been persuaded by their Jesuit masters that criticising Christianity and exposing its untruths is the same as attacking Christians.<sup>66</sup> They have not converted to the One True Faith and never will without an inducement, but they are already convinced little popes who cannot help but admire the big pope. He has what they want or already share in just a little bit — absolute power.

Christianity, and especially Roman Christianity, has very little to do with religious faith. It is and has always been a system of imperialist politics and financial racketeering practiced under

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66. H.G. Wells, in *Crux Ansata: An Indictment of the Roman Catholic Church*, writes, "[The Jesuits'] work had to be propaganda; teaching and the insinuation by every possible means of the authority and policy of the Church. ... Unfortunately for the world the Jesuits have never been able to keep clear of politics. It was against their written professions, if these are to be taken seriously, but it was manifestly among their inevitable temptations. They had their share, direct and indirect, in embroiling states, concocting conspiracies and kindling wars.... We need not expand this indictment further. Almost every country in Europe except England had at one time or another been provoked to expel the Jesuits, and ... their obdurate persistence in evil-doing continues to this day."

the guise of religion.<sup>67</sup> Its first victims are poor Christians who lead lives of subsistence and misery under the grinding heel of an imperious and repressive Church.<sup>68</sup> Its second victims are social reformers and scientists, independent scholars, philosophers and seekers of truth who dare to venture beyond the narrow confines of Christian doctrine. We are going to give the last word in this essay of quotations to one such philosopher, the Rev. Dr. Lourenco C. Torcato, a Catholic priest from Goa who founded the Research Institute of Education and Philosophy and Religion at Bombay. Dr. Torcato died last year, in 1993, under interdict and in extreme poverty because the Archbishop of Bombay had stopped his pension when he, for reasons of conscience, had refused to convert a Hindu to Christianity. As a serious thinker he was too much enamoured of Communist theory, but he was nonetheless a sincere and outspoken proponent of India's Vedic heritage who never got tired of saying, "Unfortunately, some of our Indian leaders and people wrongly value the so-called high standard of schools and colleges run by sectarian organisations, not realizing the disastrous effects of replacing true Indian culture with western ways."

In 1970, Dr. Torcato published his *Education: Its History*

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67. For example, when the Portuguese were attempting to evangelize India — "to instruct the inhabitants in the Catholic Faith and good morals" as decreed by the Pope — the Pope himself was taxing lepers and prostitutes in Rome, ten percent of their incomes, and was doing this on the authority of Catholicism's greatest theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas. For references see David Yallop's *In God's Name*, Nino Lo Bello's *The Vatican Empire*, M. Murray O'Hair's *Let's Prey*, and Avro Manhattan's *The Vatican Billions*, *The Dollar and the Vatican*, *Vatican Imperialism in the Twentieth Century*, *The Vatican in World Politics*, *The Vatican in Asia*, and *Catholic Imperialism and World Freedom*. Avro Manhattan is a former B.B.C. political commentator.

68. Mother Teresa likes to tell her international donor audiences, from whom she collects millions of tax-free dollars for her missionary enterprise, that what India really need is Jesus. We observe that the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Rwanda, Brazil, the Philippines — to name a few — all have Jesus, and have had him for some time, but that he does not seem to have done any of them any moral, spiritual, or material good.

*and Philosophy*, which caused an uproar in official Catholic circles and was immediately banned in Catholic colleges. In it he writes, "The religious organisations which control education in India openly discuss the motives and ideals of their religion-controlled educational institutions.<sup>69</sup> ... The Catholic leaders do not hesitate to say publicly the reasons which motivated the opening of their educational establishments. The reasons are based on their dogmatic religious beliefs which they openly teach in all their educational establishments, howsoever crude their religious instruction may be. Besides, the religion-based educational organisations are meant also to be the chief means of most important contact with the finest elements of Hindu society and other societies as well. The Catholic leaders maintain that the main object of their schools, colleges and other educational institutions is the education of Catholic youth, and for this purpose they try to bestow greater care on the spiritual training based on dogmatic teaching of Roman Catholicism.

"By means of Solidarities, Newman Clubs, Catholic University Students' Federation and Training Camps and such other extracurricular activities, the heads of these institutions make

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69. Malachi Martin, in *The Jesuits*, writes, "The subcontinent of India, in the eyes of Vatican planners, has a primordial importance as the one country in Asia where the Church can make huge headway. The Roman Catholic Church has poured vast resources into India. Religious orders run 115 colleges with 135,000 students, 1,200 high schools with over 500,000 pupils, 242 technical schools with over 400,000 students. It is estimated that 60 percent of all students in India attend Roman Catholic schools and colleges. In those seats of learning, 50 percent of the teachers are non-Christian. Jesuits are involved on the local, state, and national level." Raymond James Paul, in *A Catholic's Believe It or Not*, writes, "More than 7,000 educational institutions have been established by the Catholic Church in India." The real figure is much higher as these books were published in 1987 and 1963 respectively. They do not include non-Catholic educational institutions which have proliferated in recent years with the rapid spread of evangelical Protestant churches in India. A truer picture of the Christian landscape in India can be got from the 1992 report of the World Council of Churches, which says, "Indian churches put together are the biggest single land owner in India."

every effort to strengthen their religious beliefs and to deepen their spiritual life. This means in other words, the salvation of their own souls and indirectly the conversion of non-Catholic souls, for they are excluded from Heaven. Every effort possible should be made not *ex officio* but when the opportunity arises to show to fellow students the great sacramental efficacy of the door to salvation which in the theological language is called the sacrament of Baptism ...

"This what is said about the educational establishments administered by Roman Catholics holds good *mutatis mutandis* of all other Christian sects and also of Muslims and other proselytizing religious organisations. They believe that they are commanded by their prophets and by the voice from above to save the souls of others whom they call 'infidels'. This being the case, our main concern is to find out whether the right to impart education to Indians should be vested in the National Ministry of Education or in the religious and communal organisations. We know that they are bold to spread the errors and superstitions taking full advantage of the articles of the Constitution which empowers them to establish educational institutions and thus go ahead with their religious fairy tales and communal viruses to the great detriment of the most vital interests of the Indian Nation as a whole."



The myth of St. Thomas in Malabar and Mylapore, which we have reviewed in this essay, is one such fairy tale and communal virus. That it is promoted by the Roman Catholic Church through her various institutions and media is one thing, that it is cultivated by the Government of India and wilfully spread among the people by responsible Hindu citizens and their prestigious business houses is quite another. Their conduct after being informed of the facts is malafide to say the least. It is a new twist to the old tale but it is in keeping with the spirit of the original. The *Acts of Thomas* tells us that Jesus sold his brother Judas called Thomas the Twin to a trader for a handful of silver. Are we so eager and willing to do the same? Is there no other way of telling our Christian neighbour that we love him then by securing him in his error at the cost of our own blood?



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## PART TWO



## ARCHBISHOP ARULAPPA MAKES HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

K.P. SUNIL

The case has been closed. And the *dramatis personae* prefer to maintain a studied silence. For fear that a post-mortem would reveal hidden cadavers in their cupboards. For even a superficial examination of the fraud that shook the foundations of the Catholic Church in Madras in the late seventies and early eighties indicates that a lot of embarrassing details have been swept under the mat.

Reverend Dr. R. Arulappa, former archbishop of the Madras diocese, who claims to have been duped by one Acharya Paul, also known as Ganesh Iyer, is ill. Incapacitated by serious cardiac problems. In fact, it is his ill-health that forced him to retire from his post as head of the diocese. So the infamous scandal had to be pieced together from court records, police files and the ramblings of the main character — Ganesh Iyer.

It all began in the early seventies. Ganesh Iyer, who had adopted the Christian faith and was a self-styled *Bible* preacher known as John Ganesh, went to Tiruchi in the course of his evangelical journeys and met a Catholic priest Father Michael of the Tamil Illakiya Kazhagam (Tamil Literary Society). He is reported to have presented himself to the priest as Dr. John Ganesh, professor of philosophy and comparative religions at the Banaras university, and recently returned from Jammu and Kash-

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1. Originally published under the title "Hoax!" in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 26 - May 2, 1987, Bombay.

mir where he was involved in research on Christianity in India. Michael put him on to another priest, Father Mariadas of Sriviliputhur.

John Ganesh impressed Mariadas with his mastery over Christian theology. He showed him copies of notices extolling him as a speaker. He reportedly produced letters written to him by various scholars in the fields of education and religion. He is also reported to have shown Mariadas photographs of palm leaf writings and copper plate inscriptions several centuries old.

These documents, he reportedly claimed, traced the origins and development of the Christian faith in India. Since further research on the subject required money which John Ganesh claimed not to have, Mariadas took upon himself the task of locating funds for the project the successful completion of which, he felt, would provide a shot in the arm for Christianity in India.

Mariadas gave John Ganesh something in the range of Rs. 22,000 toward the research. And as his own funds were depleted, he introduced the researcher to the head of the Catholic Church in Madras, R. Arulappa.

Arulappa was a Tamil scholar who also had the reputation of being a researcher. He had translated the *New Testament* into Tamil and set to tune the *Book of Psalms*. He had also rendered in Tamil the life of Christ, *Ulagin Uyir* ("The Life of the World"). He had learned Sanskrit and translated several Christian tenets into that language. He had also done extensive research on *Tirukkural*, the creation of the Tamil bard, Tiruvalluvar.

Tiruvalluvar is known to modern generations through his immortal literature. The exact time of his existence is lost in the mists of the hoary past. Some historians believe Tiruvalluvar to be a product of the early Sangam period in Tamil literature, several centuries before Christ. The Tamil Nadu government

bases its calendar on the year of his birth. For this purpose, it is assumed that Tiruvalluvar was born exactly 2018 years ago, i.e. in the first century before Christ. Some literary experts place Tiruvalluvar in the first century after Christ, others date him 300 years after.

Just as little is known about Tiruvalluvar's origins, his religious beliefs are also shrouded in some mystery. Attempts have been made, going by the precepts contained in his verse, to speculate about his religion. While he is widely believed to have been a Hindu and the *Tirukkural* considered a revered Hindu scripture, other religions too have staked a claim on him. Since the *Tirukkural* enshrines the ideals of *ahimsā*, *dharma* and asceticism, many experts consider Tiruvalluvar to have been considerably influenced by Jain thought.

A recent paper presented by Dr. S. Padmanabhan makes Tiruvalluvar out to be a Hindu chieftain from the Kanyakumari district. Archbishop Arulappa felt that the *Tirukkural* was so profound and filled with compassionate sentiments that it must have been influenced by early Christian missionaries who came to South India in the first century after Christ, notably St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Christ.

The Christian Church of India, considered to be amongst the oldest in the world, is believed to have been founded by St. Thomas in 52 A.D. Arulappa held the view that St. Thomas, before his martyrdom on a hill near Madras, now called St. Thomas Mount, met Tiruvalluvar and influenced the bard to the extent of converting him to the nascent faith. The theory had been propounded. What remained to be obtained was proof of such an occurrence.

It was this that Ganesh Iyer, posing as John Ganesh, reportedly promised to unearth for the archbishop.

Since this suited the archbishop's scheme and since Arulappa was convinced that Ganesh was in a position to ferret

out the evidence necessary to prove his pet theory, he engaged him to take up the research. The archbishop was apparently lulled into complacency by Ganesh's mastery of Christian theology and his apparent sincerity of purpose. As if establishing a nexus between St. Thomas and Tiruvalluvar were not enough, John Ganesh also informed the archbishop that he could bring evidence that the three wise men from the East who prophesied the birth of Christ were none other than the epic Hindu sages, Vasistha, Viswamithra and Agasthya.

In 1975-76, John Ganesh began his research. And the archbishop started funding the same.

Ganesh produced photographs of palm leaf writings and copper plate inscriptions at periodic intervals. When the archbishop asked to see the originals, he was informed that they were stashed away in the safe custody of the archaeological departments and museums all over the country. It would therefore, not be possible to persuade these agencies to part with the priceless documents. He, however, promised to get his photographs authenticated by the respective agencies themselves. Thereafter, all photographs produced by Ganesh Iyer before the archbishop bore seals of the museums and departments from which he claimed to have obtained them.

Using the funds provided by the archbishop, Ganesh Iyer made a pretence of travelling extensively. It was a well-orchestrated programme. He would first inform the archbishop that he was going to Kashmir in connection with his research.

Next, the archbishop would receive letters from some Christian and Hindu religious heads in Kashmir informing him that they had come across Ganesh Iyer or, as he now called himself, Acharya Paul. The letters spoke in superlative terms about his sincerity of purpose and his noble research.

Whatever doubts the archbishop may have entertained about his researcher vanished in the face of these letters from eminent



personages. More money changed hands. Though he was quite poor when he first met the archbishop, by the time he was through, Iyer had his own house in Srirangam. He owned two cars. He had purchased considerable gold jewellery for his wife and daughters. He had substantial deposits in banks in his name.

Most of the funds for the research had come from individuals and organisations abroad. If Iyer is to be believed, the archbishop even made out his personal car in Iyer's name for a nominal Rs. 25,000. Iyer himself claims that he had not paid anything.

Questions were being asked around this time about the large sums of money being given to Acharya Paul for his research. The sceptics demanded proof that something tangible, that would benefit Christianity in the long run, had indeed been achieved. Only the archbishop's pre-eminence prevented a direct confrontation.

In 1976, Iyer obtained a passport in the name of Acharya Paul. In 1977, accompanied by the archbishop, he went abroad. To the Vatican, among other places, where he had a lengthy audience with Pope Paul VI. The duo then visited several religious congregations and spoke about comparative religions. Everywhere he went, he spoke about the origins of Christianity in India and about his "monumental research" while the archbishop displayed the evidence. Money was collected for funding further research.

During their absence from India, individuals inimical to John Ganesh had organised themselves into a powerful force. Even as he was relaxing in his home in Srirangam after his return, the archbishop was pressurised to file a complaint with the police. That he had been duped by Ganesh Iyer who had claimed to be a bachelor, but was in reality a married man. That he had defrauded the archbishop to the tune of around Rs. 14 lakhs in the name of research into Christianity.

Investigations into the sordid episode began. The police, led

initially by Inspector Seshadri and later by Inspector Chandrayaperumal, searched Iyer's residence. They unearthed the "originals" of all the photographs produced by Iyer as proof of his research — writings on strips of brown paper cut to resemble medieval palm frond writings, pasted on sheets of white paper. The police learnt that the photographs had been taken at a studio in Tiruchi and this led to the seizure of all the relevant negatives.

The police discovered how the photographs had been authenticated by various institutions — seals and rubber stamps of all the concerned institutions were lying in Iyer's home. Letterheads bearing the names of various Hindu and Christian scholars were recovered. The letters purported to have been received by Iyer from these personages, which he allegedly used to dupe Mariadas and later the archbishop, were declared to be clever forgeries by the state handwriting expert Srinivasan. The writing on these and the writing on the brown paper, though cleverly disguised, compared favourably with Iyer's specimen. Account books showing details of amounts received from the archbishop and the amounts spent by him were recovered.

Iyer's antecedents were thoroughly investigated and it was proved that he was a middle school dropout, not having studied beyond standard seven. Further confirmation was obtained from the Banares university that they did not have Dr. John Ganesh on their staff either teaching or doing research into philosophy and comparative religions.

The police case was complete. On April 29, 1980, Iyer was arrested and placed under remand, while prosecution proceedings were instituted under sections 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property), 465 (forgery), 471 (using as genuine a forged document), 473 (making and possessing counterfeit seals with intent to commit forgery) of the Indian Penal Code and under section 12-B of the Indian Passports Act (obtaining a passport supplying false

information).

Archbishop Arulappa testified against Iyer before the court. Iyer initially pleaded innocence, but later admitted to the fraud on all counts. He prayed that in view of his advancing age and critical family circumstances, he be shown leniency.

On February 6, 1986, P. Aruvudayappan, second metropolitan magistrate, Madras, delivered his judgment in case number 100087/82: "Taking advantage of the soft attitudes of public witnesses 2 and 3 (Father Mariadas and Father Arulappa)," he averred, "the defendant (Ganesh Iyer) had taken from them about Rs. 13.5 lakhs between 1975 and 1980. This has been clearly established. Taking into consideration the nature of the offences, the defendant is being held guilty under various sections of the I.P.C. and has to undergo 10 months' imprisonment and 5 month's rigorous imprisonment under section 12-B of the Indian Passports Act. These sentences are to run concurrently. He had been arrested on April 29, 1980 and let off on bail on June 27, 1980. These 59 days of imprisonment are to be deducted from the total sentence as required under section 428 of the code of criminal procedure."

The magistrate's judgment notwithstanding, doubts still linger. Why were the archbishop's suspicions not aroused until he had handed over a whopping Rs. 13,49,250 (according to records, though Iyer claims to have received far in excess of that sum) on a spurious research project? Why had the archbishop not bothered to verify the authenticity of the "documents" produced by Iyer with the museums and other institutions concerned, directly? Why did he not bother to accompany Iyer to the actual site of his "research" when he had found time to accompany him to Rome, the Vatican, Germany, France, Spain, the United States?

With the archbishop still indisposed, answers to these questions are not forthcoming.

What is even more curious is that even as criminal proceed-

ings against Iyer were in progress, in the magistrate's court, a civil suit for a compromise had been filed in the Madras high court. The compromise decree was taken up immediately after the conclusion of the criminal case. Since Iyer had admitted the offence, his jail term was reduced to a mere two months' imprisonment. And since he had already served 59 days of remand, this period was adjusted against the sentence.

In other words, Iyer, who had defrauded the archbishop to the tune of about Rs. 14 lakhs, was let off without any further punishment. He was ordered to forfeit all claim on the money given to him by the archbishop. Accordingly, the ornaments and money seized from him by the police were returned to the archbishop. As part of the compromise, Iyer was allowed to retain the large bungalow he had purchased with the archbishop's money.

"I agreed to this compromise because there was nothing else I could do," says Iyer. His viewpoint is understandable. For, going by the lower court's verdict, he would have not only had to serve 5 months of rigorous imprisonment, but would have automatically had to forfeit all his properties including the house. Why the archbishop agreed to the compromise is not understandable.

Today Ganesh Iyer lives on the first floor of his house in Srirangam — the lower portion is let out on rent, enabling him to receive a monthly income. He is by no means affluent, but is certainly a far cry from the penury to which his family and he would have been consigned, if it were not for the compromise. Father Arulappa is convalescing, recovering from a major surgery. He has handed over the mantle of archbishop to Reverend G. Casimir on "health grounds".

And the case, though officially closed, remains in many minds, an unsolved mystery.

## ACHARYA PAUL ADDS A FOOTNOTE<sup>1</sup>

GANESH IYER & K.P. SUNIL

His frame is sparse. He looks older than his 67 years. His white attire is crumpled and dirty. It is torn in a few places, indicating obvious paucity of finances. His long, flowing white beard gives him an ascetic look.

He speaks in spurts. In fluent Tamil and faultless English, unexpected in one who did not even complete his schooling. He is a great accumulator of books on a variety of subjects. From philosophy to religion, law to communism, in addition to complete sets of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Americana*. He is capable of speaking at length on any subject. An ability that endeared him to several persons, notably the Archbishop of Madras.

Ganesh Iyer, Paul Ganesh, John Ganesh, Janakiram Ganesh, Paul Gouthaman, Acharya Paul ...

Iyer was initially hesitant to talk to the *Weekly* about how he allegedly defrauded the Catholic mission in India of Rs. 14 lakhs. "The case has only now come to an end," he explains. "My opponents tried everything to crucify me before coming to a sort of compromise. I do not wish to tell you the truth of the whole affair. Because that will infuriate them further and they might renew their attacks on me. And I am financially in no position to defend myself, leave alone retaliate."

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1. Originally published under the title "What Wrong Have I Done?" in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 26 - May 2, 1987, Bombay.

### **On his background**

I have not had much by way of formal education. Only up to standard seven. My father was very poor and could not afford to educate his children much. He moved from his native village of Kannadikaathan in Ramnad district to Ceylon. It was there that I came into intimate contact with a college professor, A.H. Williams. He taught me English. He also introduced me to Christianity. I became so proficient in English that very soon, on my return to my native village, I was giving tuitions to some students.

### **On his association with Christianity**

I read a lot of books on Christianity. I became convinced that Christ was the almighty God — the saviour of the world. I voluntarily converted myself to Christianity. Nobody forced me or compelled me. I changed my name to John Ganesh. I started addressing prayer meetings and preaching. I gained so much knowledge on the subject of Christianity that I was the main speaker at several conventions. The people so loved my talks that when it was advertised in newspapers, they just thronged to hear me.

On one occasion, authorities even ran a special train to carry people coming to one of my meetings. My relatives did not object to my close links with Christianity because I was bringing in money. Though I was married, I was away most of the time and for the best part of 20 years, I had little contact with my family.

### **On his introduction to the Archbishop of Madras, Father Arulappa**

I reached a stage when I knew Christian theology better than most priests. I knew the *Bible* word for word. During my travels, I met some Catholic fathers in Sriviliputhur. They were quite

taken aback by my knowledge of Christian theology. One of them took a fancy to me. It was he who introduced me to Father Arulappa. This was around 1973-74.

### **On how he became a religious pioneer**

For the first three months Archbishop Arulappa treated me very nicely. I never even dreamt that one day he would misguide me. He used to frequently say: "Despite being Christians we do not have knowledge equal to yours on the subject. We are in a situation in which we have to learn Christianity from you."

I was perpetually short of money those days. And he used to give me some cash off and on.

One day, he told me: "You have tremendous knowledge. Now I want you to do something for me. I have a long-standing desire which you alone can fulfil and in the process, you will be able to do a tremendous service for the cause of Christianity as well."

I asked him what he wanted me to do.

Christianity, he said, was in India right from the beginning. But the general impression is that it had been brought here by foreigners. "I want to prove to the world," he said, "that lots of evidence exists in our country to prove that Christianity was here all along. I am not interested in spreading this finding among Indians. But I want it to be taken to the Westerners. It is they who are perpetuating the theory that they brought Christianity to India. I want you to do something in this connection."

He told me that he had written a book in Tamil, *Perinba Villakku*, in which he had propounded the theory that Tiruvalluvar was a Christian. I later found out that the book was not a popular one at all. That even today copies of it are gathering dust in bookstalls all over the country. He wanted me to do some work based on the contents of that book. Though Tiruvalluvar and St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's twelve disciples,

had lived in different periods, he wanted me to unearth evidence to the effect that the two great personages had indeed met and that St. Thomas had converted Tiruvalluvar to Christianity and baptized him. He assured me: "If you do this successfully, both of us will become internationally famous. We will also get a lot of money. It will be very useful to you."

I had misgivings about the whole project. Because I knew that in India there were no ancient documents or monuments on Christianity. Some documents are there, no doubt, to the effect that St. Thomas came to India. But doubts still persist whether the person mentioned in those documents is indeed apostle Thomas or his disciple.

In fact, when some celebrations were held in Kerala over two decades ago, Jawaharlal Nehru, our then prime minister, who attended the functions, asked the learned priests who had gathered: "Is it really true that St. Thomas came to India?" Nobody answered him. They merely smiled. They were unable to answer his query because they had no proof.

When I told the archbishop all this, he said: "If that is so, then we will have to concoct evidence to prove our point. Evidence like palm frond writings, copper plate inscriptions and all that." I did not like the plan one bit. But I wanted money. And this he promised to arrange for me. So I went along with him.

### **On his *modus operandi***

The archbishop had planned minutely how this was to be done. It was simple but ingenious. Simply brilliant, if perverted. He made me cut brown paper into long strips — irregular and uneven like ancient palm frond scrolls. I then wrote whatever he asked me to on these strips. I adopted a scrawl that was similar to ancient writings — often indecipherable. And the style of language was also lifted from the past. Laborious and involved.

These strips of brown paper were then pasted with glue on



white cardboard and then photographed. The photo print looked exactly like a photograph of ancient palm frond scrolls. The archbishop intended to pass these off to unsuspecting people as the real stuff. I was still hesitant. But a friend, Santiago, who used to work in a bank, advised me to go ahead and comply with the archbishop's request.

I made several such photographs. Hundreds, thousands. Entire portions of *Tirukkural* were written this way and interspersed with Christian thought. He used to give me money for expenses. Five thousand. Four thousand. Ten thousand. Whatever was left, he told me, I could keep for myself. And make myself comfortable. The money, he told me, came from abroad. It was for the specific purpose of my research. And so there was no necessity to account the same to the Church.

### **On his growing intimacy with the archbishop**

I had informed the archbishop that I was a married man. Because of financial problems, I am roaming around looking for some money, I said. I do not wish to get involved in something illegal. I do not want to get into trouble. And my family should not suffer on that account.

Whenever I used to voice such misgivings, the archbishop used to reassure me: "Don't worry. I'll stand by you. No government or police will do anything against you. I will see to that. And no one in this diocese will dare do anything against my will." He repeated this to me several times, holding my hands in his.

He also used to consult me on several other matters. In the archbishop's residential complex in Madras, there is an ashram called Shanti Ashram. This was actually constructed under direction from me. He used to tell me that I was to him what St. Paul was to Jesus Christ.

To drive home the point he even began calling me Paul. He

began introducing me to others as Acharya Paul. He told me that he had informed everyone that the research on Tiruvalluvar and St. Thomas was being done by Acharya Paul, a bachelor ... a *brahmachari*. He requested that I keep up this pretence before others. But he gave me enough money to keep my family happy.

### **On the material benefits he derived out of this association**

This house in Srirangam in which I am still staying was bought with money given by the archbishop. I also purchased some jewellery for my wife and two daughters. I had an Ambassador car at that time. In addition, the archbishop gave me the car he was personally using. I did not pay him any money for this. But he showed in his books that he had sold it to me for Rs. 25,000.

His constant refrain was: "You have whatever you want. But fulfil my life's mission. You will not have any problems." I must have benefited to the tune of over Rs. 14 lakhs during my association with the archbishop.

### **On the first rumble of trouble**

Many individuals in the Church resented my intimacy with the archbishop. I used to visit Madras frequently and on these occasions used to stay in some of the leading hotels there. The archbishop used to bear all these expenses.

There were rumours at that time that some like Father D'Souza and Father Francis (the archbishop's personal assistant) were likely to file a complaint against me before the police. But again, Father Arulappa assured me that no one under him would dare to breach his authority and file a complaint. He has even sent me letters which were seized by the police, to this effect.

### **On his trip to the Vatican**

In 1977, the archbishop and I went to Rome. We visited the

Vatican. And there I was presented to the Pope. The archbishop introduced me to the Pope as Acharya Paul, a great researcher who had done a lot to get at the roots of Christianity in India. He showed the Pope copies of some of the "documentary evidence" I had "unearthed".

Let me tell you one thing. The Pope, great man that he was, was not impressed. Though he was saying "very good, very good" all the while, he took the photographs in his hands, glanced at them and then just let them fall out of his hands.

He did not care for them. Nor did he pay much heed to what the archbishop was saying. But he was very kind to me. Despite the fact that several dignitaries including heads of states were waiting for an audience, he spent about 20 minutes with me.

### **On how he was finally exposed**

From the Vatican, we toured several places in Europe and finally returned to India. I straightaway went to my home in Srirangam. Since I did not hear from the archbishop for a number of days, I went over to Madras to meet him. It was then that he told me that during his absence, things had taken a turn for the worse. Someone had filed a complaint before the police, he informed me. But there is no cause for worry. When the matter comes to court, I only have to say a word and the case will be dropped. I worried a lot, nevertheless.

Immediately after, the police came. They raided my house and searched all over. They seized all documents and letters pertaining to the case. And they arrested me and placed me under remand. They seized my bank accounts and interrogated my family members.

I was made out to be a cheat, and a fraud. They even made out a case against me that I had taken a passport using a false name and a false address. In the passport my name was Acharya Paul, the name given to me by Archbishop Arulappa. The application had

been made out by him and he had given my address as care of the archbishop's residence in Madras?

So what wrong have I done? But who would listen to me? Who was there to talk on my behalf? No one. Why? Because everyone had been heavily bribed. That is why. I understand that they gave away as much as Rs. 15 lakhs by way of bribes.

In the metropolitan magistrate's court, they convicted me to 10 months' imprisonment. Later, in the high court, acting on a compromise petition filed, the sentence was reduced to 2 months. As I had already been under remand for nearly that period, I was let off. As part of the compromise, I had to forfeit all that I had earned through the archbishop — my money, jewellery, everything except my house which I was permitted to retain. I have no complaints about all that.

What I feel sad about is that I had done all this at the instance of the archbishop who had held all along that he would help me out at the time of trouble. But he himself came to court and testified that I had duped him and defrauded him of money. That was the last straw.

## **“DR.” DEIVANAYAKAM GETS HIS DUE<sup>1</sup>**

R.S. NARAYANASWAMI

A controversial book written by a Christian drew strong criticism and attack from eminent Hindu scholars at a function in Madras on October 24, 1991.

The book titled *Viviliyam, Tirukkural, Shaiva Siddhantam Oppu Ayvu*, written by one Deivanayakam,<sup>2</sup> was published in 1985-86. It attempted to compare *Bible*, *Tirukkural* and Shaiva philosophy and concluded that Tiruvalluvar was a disciple of St. Thomas and that his sayings were only sayings from *Bible*. The writer had attempted to distort and misinterpret the Shaiva Siddhanta to suit his conclusions that all these works emanated from the preachings of St. Thomas who is said to have visited India in the first century A.D.

It was given to the Dharmapuram Math to issue a refutation. In spite of refutations from scholars through personal letters, Deivanayakam was unrelenting. Hence the Dharmapuram Shaiva Math had a book of refutation prepared by its very able Tamil and Shaiva scholar, Arunai Vadivel Mudaliar, and released it at a function.

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1. Originally published under the title “Tamil scholars assail Christian bid to misrepresent Tiruvalluvar as St. Thomas’ disciple” in the *Organiser*, November 7, 1991, New Delhi.

2. “Dr.” M. Deivanayakam and Dr. R. Arulappa have worked together on the christianization of Tiruvalluvar and the *Tirukkural*. In 1975 they co-authored the book *Perinba Villakku* in which Tiruvalluvar is represented as being Christian.

The function organised by the Shaiva Siddhanta Sabha, was not very well publicised yet it had a gathering of over three hundred Tamil and Shaiva scholars.<sup>3</sup> The hall was packed to capacity. Justice N. Krishnaswami Reddiar, retired high court judge, presided.

Tamil and Shaiva scholar M.P. Somasundaram, who made the opening speech, deplored that in independent India freedom and rights were being misused to such an extent that books denigrating the ancient religion of the land were allowed to be written. He said the Christian book was a bundle of distortions, misconceptions and misinterpretations of *Tirukkural* verses and Shaivite philosophical works to suit the conclusions of the author — namely that Christianity had influenced Tiruvalluvar and the Nayanmars. The book was mischievous in content and aim, he asserted. He commended Arunai Vadivel Mudaliar and the Dharmapuram Math for bringing out a refutation.

Justice Krishnaswami Reddiar strongly criticised the modern tendency of publishing trash in the name of research. He said research must have an aim, a purpose, to get at the truth. Research was not meant to find evidence to denigrate an ancient faith. Research should not start with preconclusions or prejudices. Here the author's motive was to show the superiority of Christianity. Religion was based not only on facts but also on faith and beliefs. The book had hurt Hindu beliefs.

Justice Krishnaswami Reddiar quoted from the works of Sita Ram Goel and Ishwar Sharan and asserted that the visit of St. Thomas to India was a myth. He wondered how could such a book be published by [the International Institute of Tamil Studies, Adyar, Madras,] set up by the Government. It was a crime that such a book had been written and published and awarded a

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3. That this important conference of Hindu scholars was not reported in the Madras editions of *The Hindu* and *Indian Express* is very revealing of the editorial policies of these newspapers.

doctorate degree [by the University of Madras,] he said.

If such books were not refuted our progeny would find fault with us; and such books would pass as source material for future researchers. If there was no refutation, then such books would be accepted as telling the truth and would be used for further religious propaganda. He praised the Dharmapuram Math for taking pains to release the book of refutation.

Sarojini Varadappan released the book of refutation. Swaminatha Thambiran of Dharmapuram Math said the Math Head had, by personal correspondence with Deivanayakam, tried to put the facts straight. But he was unrelenting. Then a conference of scholars was held at Dharmapuram to which Deivanayakam was invited. Though he was present, he stood his ground. Then only, the Head of the Math decided to prepare this book of refutation and release it.

Dr. R. Nagaswami, eminent archaeologist, who had done some excavations at Santhome Church along with a Jesuit, quoted profusely from the writings of Jesuits and exploded the myth of the visit of St. Thomas to India. It was a Portuguese ruse to spread Christianity in India. He said Deivanayakam had taken the visit of St. Thomas to India as an established fact and, based on that, built his theory and conclusions. The fact was St. Thomas had not visited India at all. According to the evidence available, and books on St. Thomas, he had visited only Parthia, Dr. Nagaswami said. He said it was a sad reflection on the Institute of Tamil Studies which had published this book. It was shameful that Madras University had awarded a doctorate for this book without going into its merits.

Vidwan Ambai Sankaranar said that the award of doctorate to the author of the book must be withdrawn as the author had not adduced any evidence as to how Tiruvalluvar was a disciple of St. Thomas. Vidwan Sundara Murthi pointed out how the *Tirukkural* verses were misinterpreted by Deivanayakam.

T.N. Ramachandran said chronology had not at all been taken into consideration by Deivanayakam while comparing the works. Had he been a student of St. Thomas, Tiruvalluvar would have mentioned it, he said.

Vanniyar Adigal said such books were being published taking advantage of the tolerance of Hindus and the liberty and rights given in the Constitution. He said a book by a Muslim showing the superiority of *Koran* over *Tirukkural* had also been published some years back. It was time for the Hindus to take cognizance of attacks on their doctrines, beliefs and sacred books.

Eighty-five-year-old Arunai Vadivel Mudaliar, the author of the book of refutation,<sup>4</sup> who was honoured with a silk cloth and cash presentation, said that an attack on his faith was like an attack on his mother and that compelled him to refute the book of Deivanayakam.

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4. Unfortunately Mudaliar's book has not been named in this article



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## PART THREE



## IN MEMORY OF A SLAIN SAINT

C.A. SIMON

It is difficult to say whether Mylapore found its place in travel notes of many ancient foreign travellers because it had on its soil the tomb of St. Thomas or if the tomb itself was mentioned therein because of its location at Mylapore on the eastern coast. It is a historical fact that many foreign travellers used to visit this coast after sailing a long distance thanks to the Coromandel winds. Marco Polo, the great traveller, has referred to the tomb in his travel diary.

The present Gothic church was constructed over the tomb only in 1893; but it is going to be almost 20 centuries since the first church was constructed by St. Thomas, the father of Christianity in India, before his martyrdom in 73 A.D.

The tomb of St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles (disciples) of Jesus Christ, attracts people from all over the world. It is a pilgrim centre for Christians, especially during Christmas and Easter seasons. Its history, battles fought over the mortal remains of the saint, burial, excavation, relocation of the tomb, etc., all form part of a high drama the church witnessed over the centuries.

Today Santhome has in its possession only a piece of bone and the metal spearhead with which the saint was assassinated in Madras. These are kept under the safe custody of the priests. It is exposed for public veneration during the annual solemn novena for the feast of St. Thomas on July 3rd every year.

The expression "doubting Thomas" originated after Thomas, disciple of Jesus Christ, who was not ready to believe the resurrection of the Christ when it was narrated to him by other disciples to whom Jesus appeared for the first time after the crucifixion and burial. Thomas declared: "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

According to the *Bible*, Jesus appeared again inside a closed room where all the disciples were planning their next course of action. Jesus called Thomas and asked him to put his finger on the mark of the wounds. Thomas was taken aback. Thomas felt divine reality encountering human weakness of doubt face to face. He was convinced. He knelt down and uttered: "Thou art my Lord and God."

Thomas landed at Maliankara (Cranganore in Kerala) in 52 A.D. with Habban, a foreign trader. He preached the Gospel, wrought miracles and went to Mailepuram (now Mylapore) and then on to China. He returned to Maliankara at the behest of the son-in-law of the Raja of Thiruvanchikulam.

Thomas spent the last part of his life in Madras preaching the Gospel. A large number of people listened and embraced the way of life preached by him. The oppressed and downtrodden followed him and claimed equal status in society as it was denied them by the prevailing social norms. He condemned untouchability and attempted to restore equal status for women.

Many stories are sung as folk songs and have descended to us through the generations. One of them about the origin of the church at Santhome is very interesting.

A huge timber log was washed ashore by the waves. In spite of the battery of strong men deployed by King Mahadeva, they could not succeed in bringing it to the shore. As suggested by some of his courtiers, the king summoned the saint. St. Thomas performed another miracle. Pleased by this, the king offered a

place near the shore where the timber was first sighted. Thus the old church at Mylapore was built.

As he preached and performed miracles, enemies also grew in number and strength. They vowed to finish him. He had to spend some time in a cave at Little Mount hiding from his enemies. Finally he was killed at what is now known as St. Thomas Mount.

His body was brought to Mylapore, buried and the exact location was forgotten for a long time. Later, in 1523, while digging for laying foundation for a new church they came across signs of the tomb. Immediately the priest in charge of the operation sought the help of higher authorities and then continued excavation.

They removed a lot of earth. After removing two concrete slabs placed between sand and earth they came upon pieces of bones and skull. At the foot there was an earthen vessel supposedly filled with earth taken from the spot where the saint's blood was shed. They further unearthed a metal spearhead having the shape of an olive leaf and also struck upon a wooden shaft.

The bones and other mortal remains were kept in a box and later buried at an undisclosed location near the church as the priest feared for the safety of the same since the news of possible attack by neighbouring kings were pouring in.

Rivalries among Dutch, French and British wrought devastation on Santhome. The Golconda Sultans attacked and occupied the place for years. In 1646, Mir Jumla, Nawab of Carnatic, also attacked.

Hyder Ali, Sultan of Mysore, besieged Santhome three times during 1769, 1780 and 1782.

Due to several attacks and siege, Santhome church was damaged beyond recognition. In 1893 the new church was constructed. The tall bell-tower is an evidence of Gothic architectural excellence.

The church was made a minor basilica in 1956 by Pope Pius XII. The basilica title is conferred on churches based on its antiquity, magnificence and celebrity. The word basilica means a church with honorific privileges. There are only four major basilica in the whole world. None of them is in India and the most prominent among them is the St. Peter's at Vatican.

The tomb of great historical importance is inside the church at Santhome near the sanctum sanctorum. It is open to visitors almost during the whole day. The Tourism Development Corporation on its conducted tours makes a stop at the tomb.

A lot of efforts are on to provide better facilities for the tourists visiting the church every day. Fr. Charles, assistant priest, further informed this writer that there may be celebrations on the 3rd of every month, starting from January 1990 onwards, with the help of parishioners.



This story, with photographs of Santhome Cathedral Basilica, appeared on 30 December 1989 on the front page of the *Express Weekend*. It was placed below a feature of Madras city history. No indication was given to show that one article dealt with popular legend and the other with historical fact. They were presented together to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the founding of the British factory north of Mylapore and Triplicane at the fishing village of Madraspatnam.

On reading the St. Thomas feature, we sent a letter of protest to the *Indian Express* editor exposing Simon's story. It was published on 13 January 1990 in the *Express Weekend*. The

paragraphs that were excised by the editor are reproduced here in italics:

*Apropos of the article "In Memory of a Slain Saint" (E.W. Dec. 30), it is indeed astonishing that the Indian Express allows its respected columns to be used to promote this Catholic romance as historical fact in this age of excellent critical scholarship.<sup>1</sup>*

In this book *Papacy: Its Doctrine and History* (Voice of India, New Delhi, 1986) the historian Sita Ram Goel writes *about the St. Thomas myth*.

"Some Catholic scholars have been busy for many years marshalling literary and archaeological evidence in an effort to prove that St. Thomas came to India in 52 A.D., converted some Hindus in the South, and was killed by Brahmins at Mylapore in Madras while giving the Good News to the local people ...

"It would be a waste of time to present the pros and cons of this controversy which tends to become more and more technical. Suffice it to say that some historians have seriously doubted the very existence of an apostle named Thomas. Distinguished scholars like R. Garbe, A. Harnack and L. de la Vallee-Poussin have denied credibility to the *Acts of Thomas*, an apocryphal work on which the whole story is based. Some others, who accept the fourth century Catholic tradition about the travels of St. Thomas, point to the lack of evidence that he ever went east beyond Ethiopia and Arabia Felix. The confusion, according to them, has arisen because the ancient geographers often mistook these two countries for India.

"The whole subject has been examined recently by Stephen Neill in his *History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to 1707 A.D.* published by the Cambridge University Press, England, as late as 1984. He says, 'A number of scholars, among whom are to be mentioned with respect Bishop A.E. Medlycott, J.N. Farquhar and the Jesuit J. Dahlman, have built on slender foundations what can only be called Thomas romances, such as reflect the vividness of their imaginations rather than the prudence of rigid historical critics.' Pained by the spread of this spurious history among large

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1. This paragraph was converted by the editor into the prosaic introductory line: "This refers to 'In Memory of a Slain Saint' (E.W. Dec. 30)."

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

sections of Indian Christians, he observes, 'Millions of Christians in India are certain that the founder of their church was none other than apostle Thomas himself. The historian cannot prove it to them that they are mistaken in their belief. He may feel it right to warn them that historical research cannot pronounce on the matter with a confidence equal to that which they entertain by faith.' Stephen Neill ... was a bishop who had spent long years in India."

*There is also reason to believe that St. Thomas Church stands on the ruins of a Jain Neminathaswami temple and a Hindu Shiva temple which had a Nataraja shrine attached. The epigraphical data for the existence of the Jain temple on this site is recorded in Jain Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu by A. Ekambaranath and C.K. Sivaprakasham (Research Foundation for Jainology, Madras, 1987). The evidence for the existence of the Shiva temple, which may be the original Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore beach that got "eroded" by the "sea", is compiled in an excellent Tamil-language book called Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai ("The Saint Thomas Myth in India") by Ved Prakash (R.A.F.R., Madras, 1989). This book is recommended for its wealth of information and is available from R.A.F.R., 57 Poonamallee High Road, Maduravayal, Madras 602102.*

When this letter appeared in the *Express Weekend* without the last paragraph, which referred to the destroyed temples, we sent a letter of protest on January 16th to the *Indian Express* resident editor:

Apropos of my letter on St. Thomas and the St. Thomas Church, I must observe that the truncated version published in the *Express Weekend* on Jan. 13th, which omits all reference to the building of the church, is not acceptable and does not do justice to history.

As a Catholic apologist was given prime space in the *Express Weekend* on Dec. 30th to tell his version of this controversial story, the *Indian Express* is obliged to give space to another writer or at least permit an open review of the subject.

The destruction of temples by Muslims has been discussed in the *Indian Express* by many persons including Arun Shourie, as has the destruction of Jain (and if I remember correctly, Buddhist) temples in Kanchi and Kashmir by certain Hindu kings. The Christians have



### *In Memory of A Slain Saint*

completely escaped this review though they were the worst perpetrators of these kinds of deeds. This is ironical, for Christian missionaries continue to try to force conversion and destroy village temples in Central India.

The editorial tactic of only permitting Christians to criticize Christians does not wash and indicates a double standard operating in the newspaper. The editors have never hesitated to permit Christians to lecture and criticize Hindus and Muslims when they choose to do so.

The *Express Weekend* refuses to review Ved Prakash's *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai* ("The Saint Thomas Myth in India") or even list it as a book received — though in fact the newspaper has received four copies of it.

When the Pope in Rome can no longer enforce the Index,<sup>2</sup> how is it that the *Indian Express* can censor our reading material, obstruct free access to information, and suppress discussion of a subject because it is controversial?

In honour of free speech, the very least you can do is give a fair review to this interesting little book on St. Thomas and the legends that surround him and the church at Mylapore.

Ved Prakash's book was never reviewed by the *Indian Express*, though the editor acknowledged receipt of a copy and promised to give it his attention.

But our protest did not go unnoticed, and as we had sent out copies of the January 13th letter to various interested people, the excised paragraph would appear in the *Indian Express* on February 10th in a letter from Swami Jyotirmayananda. His letter was cut too and those lines which offended the editor appear below in italics:

Sri Ishwar Sharan has rightly debunked the *so-called historical* feature "In Memory of a Slain Saint" (E.W. Jan. 13) quoting distinguished historians *who have seriously doubted the very existence of an apostle named St. Thomas.*

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2. The official list of books Catholics are forbidden to read.

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

*In fact the feature that appeared in E.W. December 30th is false and misleading and there is a large body of evidence saying that there never was a Thomas at all, never mind that he came to Madras.*

There is reason to believe that St. Thomas Church stands on the ruins of a Jain Neminathaswami temple and a Shiva temple which had a Nataraja shrine attached. The epigraphical data for the existence of the Jain temple on this site is recorded in "Jain Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu" by A. Ekambaranath and C.K. Sivaprakasham (Research Foundation for Jainology, Madras, 1987). The evidence for the existence of the Shiva temple, which may be the original Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore beach that got eroded by the sea,<sup>3</sup> is found in "The Saint Thomas Myth in India" (in Tamil) by Ved Prakash (R.A.F.R., Madras, 1989), who has provided a wealth of information on the subject.

This paragraph — for the non-publication of which we had taken the *Indian Express* editor to task — contained wrong information about the Kapaleeswara Temple and to make matters worse, the wrong information was attributed to a wrong source. The correct source for our wrong information about the original temple, was the 1985 edition of the T.T.K. *A Map's Guide Book to Madras* which says, "Tradition has it that the first temple was by the sea but erosion caused it to be shifted inland."

The real tradition of course was that the "erosion" of the original Kapaleeswara Temple on the seashore had been caused by Christians. This fact would finally be brought to light in the *Express Weekend* on March 3rd in a letter from Ved Prakash:

This refers to the letter of Swami Jyotirmayananda published under the caption "Santhome Church" (E.W. Feb. 10). Certain details he has mentioned about my book *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadaï* ("The Saint Thomas Myth in India") are incorrect as pointed out below.

He writes, "The evidence for the existence of the Shiva temple, which may be the original Kapaleeswara Temple on the Mylapore

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3. The words "eroded" and "sea" should have been in quotation marks.

beach that got eroded by the sea, is found in "The Saint Thomas Myth in India" (in Tamil) by Ved Prakash (R.A.F.R., Madras, 1989), who has provided a wealth of information on the subject." But, nowhere in the book do I mention that the Shiva temple on the Mylapore beach was eroded by the sea. What is mentioned about the Shiva temple is as follows: "... many evidences available in Santhome Church show there was a Shiva temple and it was occupied, then step by step demolished and converted into a church. Many documents and books also prove this. A fragmentary Tamil inscription of 8 lines on a stone found at the cathedral registers a tax-free gift for burning at night a lamp before the image of Kuthadumdevar (Nataraja) in the temple of Suramudayar (Suramudayar Kuthadum Devarkku) was found in 1924. It belongs to Vikrama Chola's time, i.e., 12th century. Moreover, when the *urchava murthy* was taken for procession from the existing Kapaleeswara Temple, there was a practice of lowering it reverently three times before the Santhome Church at that time (16th-18th centuries). The temple was there up to the 16th century. Then, when the Christians started demolishing it completely, Hindus built the present temple out of whatever they could salvage from the ruins of the old temple." (P. 41-42, *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai*.)

The publisher is not R.A.F.R. Either it should be M.M.A.K. (Menattu Mathangal Araychi Kazhagam) or I.S.W.R. (Institute for the Study of Western Religions), 57 Poonamallee High Road, Maduravayal, Madras 602102.

This was the third and last letter published in the *Express Weekend* in reply to C.A. Simon's article. The letters were not a sufficient or comprehensive reply, but the *Indian Express* would not tolerate further criticism of the St. Thomas fable in its columns.

## THE LEGEND OF A SLAIN SAINT TO STAIN HINDUISM

SWAMI TAPASYANANDA

This article has been provoked by two write-ups in the Madras edition of the *Indian Express*. The first of these is "In Memory of a Slain Saint" by C.A. Simon in the *Express Weekend* of the *Indian Express* of 30 December 1989, and the second, a rejoinder to it by Ishwar Sharan in the "Weekend Post" of the *Express Weekend* of 13 January 1990.

The first write-up, C.A. Simon's, whether based on facts or fiction, is highly derogatory of Hinduism, which is, even to this day, highly tolerant of other religions. The chief items of information contained in C.A. Simon's writings are as follows: (1) St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Christ (a disputed fact), came to India in A.D. 52 with Habban, a foreign trader. (2) He landed at Maliankara (Cranganore) in Kerala, preached the Gospel, wrought miracles, and got many converts. (3) Then he came to Mailepuram (Mylapore), then went to China, after some time returned to Maliankara, and from there came again to Madras where he spent the rest of his life teaching, preaching and drawing a large number of the oppressed and the suppressed into his fold. (4) He performed miracles which made the local king Mahadeva offer him a place near the seashore where the old church of Mylapore now stands. (5) His conversion activities incensed the orthodox and enemies from their rank vowed to finish him. (6) He had therefore to hide himself in a cave at the Little Mount near the present St. Thomas Mount (about five kms.

away from Mylapore). (7) Finally, he was murdered there, i.e., at St. Thomas Mount, by those fanatical enemies, and (8) his body was brought to Mylapore and buried in A.D. 73 at a spot which was forgotten for many centuries.

But the greatest miracle was to occur in 1523, nearly fifteen hundred years after the saint was supposed to have died. That was the rediscovery of the tomb and remains of the murdered saint by the priest in charge of the Mylapore church for building a new church — pieces of bones, a skull, a vessel containing mud supposedly from the place where the saint's blood was shed, and a spearhead of the shape of an olive leaf fixed on a wooden shaft.

Wonder of wonders! Even after about fifteen centuries these remains, including the stick, had not become fossilized or crumbled into dust, but could be got intact and buried at an undisclosed place in the church. That church was damaged beyond recognition in the course of the battles waged round it during the rivalry between the Dutch, the French, and the British and Hyder Ali. (Strangely, the Portuguese are not said to be involved in it, perhaps because they were the heroic defenders!) At last in 1893 the present Santhome Church with Gothic architectural excellence was built. (It must be by the Portuguese and none else.) The papal seal over this whole story was stamped in 1956 when Pope Pius XII gave it recognition as a "Minor Basilica", all the four major ones being outside India.

The above legend, that is dexterously built into a mighty balloon to boost Christian fanaticism, is neatly pricked in the rejoinder by Ishwar Sharan, published as a letter to the editor in the "Weekend Post" of the *Indian Express* of 13 January 1990. The points mentioned by him are as follows: In his book *Papacy: Its Doctrine and History*, Sita Ram Goel writes:

Some Catholic scholars have been busy for many years marshalling literary and archaeological evidence in an effort to prove that St. Thomas came to India in 52 AD, converted some Hindus in the

South and was killed by the Brahmins in Mylapore in Madras. Suffice it to say that some historians have seriously doubted the very existence of an apostle named St. Thomas. Distinguished scholars like R. Garbe, A. Harnack and L. de la Vallee-Poussin have denied credibility to the *Acts of Thomas*, an apocryphal work on which the whole story is based. Some others who accept the fourth century Catholic tradition about the travels of St. Thomas, point to the lack of evidence that he ever went beyond Ethiopia and Arabia Felix. The confusion, according to them, has arisen because the ancient geographers often mistook these two countries for India.

He further refers to Stephen Neill's book *History of Christianity in India: From the Beginnings to 1707 A.D.* published by the Cambridge University Press, England, in 1984, as follows:

A number of scholars, among whom are to be mentioned with respect Bishop A.E. Medlycott, J.N. Farquhar and the Jesuit J. Dahlman, have built on slender foundations what may be called Thomas romances, such as reflect the vividness of their imaginations rather than the prudence of rigid historical critics.

Pained by the spread of this spurious history among large sections of Christians, he observes:

Millions of Christians in India are certain that the founder of their church was none other than apostle Thomas himself. The historian cannot prove it to them that they are mistaken in their belief. He may feel it right to warn them that historical research cannot pronounce on the matter with a confidence equal to that which they entertain by faith.

Stephen Neill was a bishop who had spent long years in India.

To these we want to make ensuing comments to disprove these assumptions of pious Christians. Further absurdities in Thomas legends are revealed in S. Muthiah's *Madras Discovered* published by Affiliated East-West Press. The following are the facts gleaned from it: Thomas shunted between St. Thomas Mount and Mylapore, separated by about five kms., doing his

preaching work and converting thousands. He lived in a cave at Little Mount in Saidapet, three kms. from St. Thomas Mount. There is, to the east of the cave, an opening which is said to have opened in those days into a tunnel from the Little Mount to St. Thomas Mount. The saint is supposed to have fled from his persecutors through this cave. He was however murdered by them at St. Thomas Mount. Mylapore has only the honour of being the place where his dead body was brought and buried. From there his remains were taken to Edessa in Syria where every July a great festival is held to commemorate his reburial. From Edessa they are said to have been moved to the Greek island of Chios, thence to Ortona on Italy's Adriatic coast where they remain to this day. But each resting place still has some relic of Thomas — Madras has a small hand bone and the head of a lance in the St. Thomas Basilica crypt.

More miracles in proof of this legend of murder are yet to come. In 1547 the Vicar of Mylapore during excavation at St. Thomas Mount discovered a "bleeding" cross with old Pahlavi inscriptions. It had spots that looked like blood stains which, it is claimed, reappeared after being rubbed away. This cross is built into the wall behind the altar of the church on the Mount dedicated to Madonna of the Mount. The tradition about this cross is that it was chiselled from a rock by the apostle himself. It is said that it used to bleed periodically. The first publicly noticed bleeding was on 15 December 1558 and the last in 1704.

Apart from these fanciful anecdotes about St. Thomas in Madras, Christianity of a brand which had nothing to do with Western Christianity had come to the Malabar coast very early. Sometime about A.D. 450 one Canai Thomas with seventy-two Syrian families arrived in Kerala and whatever traces of early Christianity there were got mixed up with this Syrian brand of it. So these Christians, known till then as Nazaranis (Nazarenes),

got also the name Syrian Christians.<sup>1</sup> Their connection to this day is with the Orthodox Church of Syria. The grafting of this powerful group with the existing fragmentary Christian groups must have led to the identification of Kerala Christians with the Thomas tradition, to which they hold steadfastly to this day. The St. Thomas of their fancy must really be Canai Thomas of Syria. The members of this community were adventurous traders with business connections with many countries abroad, and through commerce they brought much wealth to the country. They therefore enjoyed the patronage of the local kings. Their numbers increased not only by the absorption of the existing fragment of the Christian community but the influx of many Hindus from highly aristocratic classes owing to the rigorous rules of excommunication that prevailed among them. Such excommunications were common among them for breach of caste rules, and these excommunicated individuals, men or women, had no other course than to join this new community. This crossbreed Christian community of Kerala is distinguished from the converts by later Catholic and Protestant missionaries both in appearance and talents. In modern India they are everywhere found to occupy high positions in the professional and business life of the country. Their names too are usually different from the European names by which most of the later converted Christians were known till very recent times.

Now to go back to the legend of St. Thomas in Madras. It is clearly the fabrication of the Portuguese to camouflage their destruction of the Hindu Temple of Kapaleeswara which was situated on the seashore, probably at the very place where

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1. Thomas of Cana and the seventy-two Syrian families arrived in 345 C.E. They were the *first* Christians to arrive in India. Swami Tapasyananda has made an error here and identified the Jerusalem merchant with a later migration from West Asia. All Christian groups in Malabar, whether called Nazaranis or Nestorians, were of Syrian or Persian origin. They were divided into two basic groups: those who married Indians and those who did not.



Santhome Church now stands. The great Saivite saint of sixth century A.D., Tirujnanasambandar, sings in the 6th *Poompavai Padikam Thevaram*:

The Lord of Kapaleeswaram sat watching the people of Mylapore — a place full of flowering coconut palms — taking ceremonial bath in the sea on the full moon day of the month of Masai.

In the same strain sings Arunagirinathar, who came to Mylapore in 1456, in his *Tirumayilai Tiruppugazh*:

O Lord of Mailai (Mylapore) temple, situated on the shores of the sea with raging waves ...

This clear and indisputable evidence gives the lie to the legend that the Portuguese invented to hide their nefarious work. The Portuguese domination of Mylapore was from 1522 to 1697, by which time the British had established themselves in the Fort St. George and adjoining territories, and the Portuguese had to withdraw to Goa where their empire lasted till 1962. In Goa their rule was noted for a spree of destruction of Hindu temples and persecution of the Goanese, so much so that large sections of them had to flee that territory and settle all along the west coast of India. They are the Gauda Saraswats. The fate of these Goanese would have overtaken the temples and the people of Madras also, a foretaste of which contingency they got in the destruction of the holy Kapaleeswara Temple. Thanks to the British domination of the region and the consequent elimination of the Portuguese, this tragic fate did not overtake them. The British had more political maturity and diplomatic perception, which helped them perceive that trade was more important for themselves than religious propaganda. And so they kept an attitude of indifference towards the religion and religious edifices of the people in whose midst they carried on their trading activities, which eventually led to the establishment of a political empire.

The destruction of the seashore Temple of Kapaleeswara is

said to have taken place in 1561. The new temple at its present site, about one km. to the west, was built by pious Hindu votaries about three hundred years ago, i.e., about two hundred and fifty years after its destruction. When the Santhome Church was repaired in the beginning of the current century, many stones with edicts were found there. Among them one mentions Poompavai, the girl whom Tirujnanasambandar is said to have miraculously revived from her ashes kept in an urn.

These are all matters of the forgotten past. Both the Kapaleeswara Temple and the Santhome Church are now thriving and catering to the spiritual needs of the Hindus and the Christians. In such a situation it is better not to rake up the memories of these unpleasant facts. According to forward-looking people many things of the past are better forgotten than remembered and ruminated upon. The history of the Kapaleeswara Temple and Santhome Church belongs to this category.

But the priests of the Santhome Church will not allow this. They want to keep the flame of fanaticism bright. It is distressing to note the following passage in C.A. Simon's write-up in the *Indian Express* of 30 December 1989:

Today Santhome has in its possession only a piece of bone and the metal spearhead with which the saint was assassinated at Madras. These are under the safe custody of the priests. It is exposed for public veneration during the annual solemn novena for the feast of St. Thomas on July 3rd every year.

What is still more threatening is the concluding sentence:

Fr. Charles, assistant priest, further informed this writer that there may be celebrations on the 3rd of every month, starting from January 1990 onwards, with the help of the parishoners.

This attempt to keep up the fanaticism of the minority may inflame the fanaticism of the majority too, and lead to situations like the Babri Masjid controversy. All right-thinking men should

foresee and avoid the occurrence of such a contingency.



This article appeared in the June 1990 issue of *The Vedanta Kesari*, published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math in Mylapore, Madras. It had been submitted three months earlier to the *Indian Express*, Madras, but had elicited no response from the fearless newspaper — though, as will be seen, the resident editor was fully aware of its existence in his office.

Ram Swarup of New Delhi, on reading the article, sent a letter to *The Vedanta Kesari* editor on June 27th:

Reference Swami Tapasyananda's piece, "The Legend of a Slain Saint to Stain Hinduism", in your journal of June 1990. I beg to point out respectfully that a most excellent article has been marred by a bad ending. Can't we in all veracity speak of Semitic iconoclasm without first accusing ourselves of fanaticism? And where is the much feared Hindu fanaticism in the so-called "Babri Masjid" controversy? Does it consist in our remembering that fanatic forces destroyed our temples and that we must do something about it? But must we start indulging in self-condemnation even before we have started doing anything and the issues have joined? In the language of the *Gita*, this state of mind comes from *hridaya-daurbalyam* and *karpanya-dosha* and can achieve little.

The psychological disarmament of Hinduism has been going on for a long time and we have learnt to pull down our defences even before we have built them. Unfortunately, it has been often preached by some of the best minds of Hinduism.

This letter was not published by *The Vedanta Kesari* as the magazine does not publish letters to the editor.

We had also sent copies of Swami Tapasyananda's article to

C.A. Simon, the Archbishop of Madras at Santhome, and the *Indian Express* editor. C.A. Simon was the only one to respond with a letter on August 9th. He had learned from the *Express Weekend* editor that we planned to include his article in the appendix of the first edition of this book, and though he had not yet been informed of the project, he wrote:

Thank you for sending me the xerox copies of the articles written by Swami Tapasyananda and published by *Vedanta Kesari*.

My interest in that article is purely academic as I am not championing anybody's cause. Also I was not aware of the version given in your letter or in the article.

Main sources for my article was two books:

1. *In the Steps of St. Thomas* by Rt. Rev. Herman D'Souza.
2. *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia* edited by Sri George Menachery.

A few of the leaflets were also referred for the article. A facsimile of postal stamp released by Govt. of India during the occasion (said to be) of the 19th centenary in 1972 also was seen. The speech given by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, former president of India, "Remember St. Thomas came to India ..." was also referred.

I am trying to say that the article was not written with any malafide intention, and I was not aware of the controversial version given by Sri Sita Ram Goel. Since I am aware of it now I note to honour the other version also.

I learned that you are going to publish a book and intend to include my article as the Christian version. As I do not stand for any religious sect or group you may desist from doing so. Instead you may refer to more authoritative works of this subject if you feel so.

Being a scholar of great understanding about the subject, I hope, you may take this in proper spirit.

You may bring this to notice of Swami Tapasyananda in order to clear any misunderstanding.

Kindly acknowledge this letter. You may feel free to write to me.

We did indeed acknowledge this letter and replied to it on August 14th as follows:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 9th.

My essay on the myth of St. Thomas has been written in reply to your article which appeared in the *Indian Express* of 30 December 1989.

Considering this, and that you and the *Indian Express* initiated the controversy by publishing the sly communal tale as Madras city history, you can hardly ask me to desist from reprinting it.

Your article is the subject of public discussion and a necessary reference, and is being reproduced as an appendix to my reply.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to believe that your interest in St. Thomas is only academic. You have not named any unbiased scholar nor given any credible academic reference.

In fact you have written an excellent piece of Roman Catholic propaganda "in the steps of Rt. Rev. Herman D'Souza" — who went to great lengths to manipulate Indian history and vilify Hindus in his work — and I must congratulate you on your success.

As you quote Marco Polo and Rajendra Prasad as proof that St. Thomas came to India, so Indians will now quote you and the *Indian Express* as further proof that St. Thomas came to India.

Your letter amounts to a disclaimer and should really be directed to the editor of the *Indian Express*, but if you wish to communicate further with me you are of course welcome to do so.

This was the end of the correspondence. C.A. Simon did not communicate further with us and as no disclaimer appeared in the *Express Weekend*, it may be assumed that neither he nor his editor regretted the publication of the "historical" communal tale in *Indian Express* columns.

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2. In the first edition of this book, published in February, 1991, where Simon's article will appear in the appendix.

## TAINTED PEOPLE

HARRY MILLER

Young photographer P. Justine braved the murderous traffic roaring incontinently up and down the Anna Flyover to take this infuriating picture<sup>1</sup> — infuriating because of the sheer gall of American evangelists coming here and not only proselytising but disfiguring public walls with their offensive posters. Our Corporation, hard-up and overstretched as usual, have to spare workmen to scrape them off again, as seen in Justine's picture. Can't these tainted people be prosecuted? Why are they allowed into the country at all? Now see if you believe what follows, which is quoted from a leaflet, dated 1985, lying beside me. "A small van loaded with scriptures was hijacked recently — and our people lived to tell of it. Our Bible van was stopped and surrounded in the jungle by a gang of heavily armed men.... Nervously the small band of Bible Society volunteers eyed their savage-looking captors. Surely they were only moments away from death. In India's jungles, who would even know where to look for them.... The natives fingered their weapons ... they had never heard the name of Jesus before.... One of the team preached the first sermon about Jesus these primitive people had ever heard."

And so it goes on, ending with the usual appeal for twenty-

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1. The photograph above the article showed Madras Corporation workers removing a long line of posters advertising a hallelujah meeting from the flyover wall.

five dollars — more if you can spare it — to bring the word of Jesus to India's ignorant natives. And where do you suppose this desperate saga of courage and fortitude took place? In the bandit-infested ravines of Madhya Pradesh? In the deep jungles of Bastar or distant Mizoram? No, believe it or not, all this is supposed to have taken place near Goa! Goa! Of all places, Goa, highly literate and solidly Christian since the 15th century. And if any of you ignorant natives out there who have never heard the name of Jesus don't believe me, they are welcome to come and see the leaflet from which I have quoted.<sup>2</sup> But before you do so it might be as well to be reminded that the very first evangelist — one Thomas by name — landed on our shores within a few years of the Crucifixion, some five centuries before America was "discovered". We have never needed another.



This item appeared in Harry Miller's column "Madras — City of Neglect" in the *Indian Express* of 29 January 1990. Because of its reference to the landing of St. Thomas on Indian shores — a provocative statement that Miller and his editor were aware of, made as it was a month after the appearance of Simon's article — we sent a letter on January 30th to the *Indian Express*, with a copy to Harry Miller, with the specific request that it be published:

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2. Sri Aurobindo in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, quoted by Arun Shourie in *A Secular Agenda*, was also constrained to note "the intemperate drunkenness of denunciation and vomit of false witness, hatred, uncharitableness and all things degrading and unspiritual and unclean that are the mark of a certain type of 'Christian literature'..."

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

Apropos of the feature "Madras — City of Neglect" (I.E. Jan. 29), Harry Miller, like most Indians, seems unaware that the story of Thomas in India is in fact a Roman Catholic romance based on the apocryphal book called the *Acts of Thomas*. This work, which is included in Catholic bibles,<sup>3</sup> has no historical credibility whatsoever according to eminent scholars like L. de la Vallee-Poussin, A. Harnack and Richard Garbe. Other authorities maintain there never was an apostle named Thomas, while some who accept that he lived say that he did not travel beyond Arabia Felix and Ethiopia — two countries that were often mistaken for India by ancient geographers.

Gibbon wanted to know if this Thomas of legend was an apostle, Manichaean or Armenian merchant.

Prof. Jarl Charpentier of Uppsala University wrote in *St. Thomas the Apostle and India*, in 1927, "There is absolutely not the shadow of a proof that an Apostle of our Lord — be his name Thomas or something else — ever visited South India or Ceylon and founded Christian communities there."

Bishop Stephen Neill in his *History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to 1707 A.D.* (Cambridge University Press, London, 1984), laments the spread of this spurious history among Indians.

Sita Ram Goel in his *Papacy: Its Doctrine and History* (Voice of India, New Delhi, 1986), has carefully analysed the many reasons for the Church to spread and maintain this myth. Two pertinent reasons are:

1. By claiming Brahmins killed Thomas, "the Catholic Church can malign the Brahmins more confidently. Brahmins have been the main target of its attack from the beginning. Now it can be shown that the Brahmins have always been a vicious brood, so much so that they would not stop from murdering a holy man who was only telling God's own truth to a tormented people. At the same time, the religion of the Brahmins can be held responsible for their depravity."

2. "It is [intrinsic to] Catholic theology to claim that a land which has been honoured by the visit of an apostle has become a patrimony of the Catholic Church.... Since that auspicious moment when St. Thomas stepped on her soil, the Hindu claim [to India]

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3. This is not true. It is in fact very difficult to find a copy of the *Acts of Thomas* anywhere except in a Jesuit library.



stands cancelled. The country has belonged to the Catholic Church from the first century onwards, no matter how long the Church takes to conquer it completely for Christ."

Moreover, there is epigraphical evidence that the St. Thomas Cathedral Basilica on the Mylapore beach stands on the ruins of a Jain Neminathaswami Temple and the original Kapaleeswara Shiva Temple that got "eroded" by the "sea".<sup>4</sup> The data for the existence of the Jain temple on this site is recorded in *Jain Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu* by A. Ekambaranath and C.K. Sivaprakasham (Research Foundation for Jainology, Madras, 1987), and the evidence for the existence of the ancient Kapaleeswara Temple, which was in fact destroyed by Portuguese Catholic missionaries in 1566, is compiled in an excellent Tamil-language book called *Indiavil Saint Thomas Kattukkadai* ("The Saint Thomas Myth in India") by Ved Prakash (Menattu Mathangal Araychi Khazhagam, Madras, 1989).

This letter was not published, nor did Harry Miller acknowledge his error — though he is always the first to jump on the next man for making a mistake — and over the year 1990 — the period these articles cover — the *Indian Express* editor would occasionally pass items promoting the myth of St. Thomas as Indian history. We would reply to these items, as would others, but our letters were never published. We would eventually have to concede that the editor was not going to allow the truth about this tale, or the City's churches,<sup>5</sup> to appear in *Indian Express* columns.<sup>6</sup>

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4. This dubious quotation from the 1985 edition of the T.T.K. *A Map's Guide Book to Madras* (see page 158), would be brought to our attention for months to come and in that it was noticed by so many readers shows that the citizens of Madras were fully aware that the temple had been destroyed by Christians — a fact that we state in the next sentence of this letter.

5. Letters pointing out that Luz Church, Santhome Cathedral, Our Lady of Health Church and Our Lady of Expectation Church were built on temple sites were also suppressed.

6. After reading about our encounter with the *Indian Express*, an intelligence officer who poses as a journalist told us that the distinguishing features of the Indian editor and journalist are arrogance — they think that they are the only ones who know anything — and a general contempt for the intelligence of the reading public.



## PART FOUR



## SAINT THOMAS AND CASTE

In his article "In Memory of a Slain Saint", C.A. Simon wrote, "St. Thomas spent the last part of his life in Madras preaching the Gospel. A large number of people listened and embraced the way of life preached by him. The oppressed and downtrodden followed him and claimed equal status in society as it was denied them by prevailing social norms. He condemned untouchability and attempted to restore equal status to women."

This stereotyped and oft-times-proven untrue description of ancient Hindu society has been promoted by Christians for centuries. By repeating it C.A. Simon shows that his interest in writing the article is not "purely academic". He is championing a cause, and he has presented St. Thomas as the champion and pioneer of a cause — Liberation Theology.

This new role for St. Thomas is absurd, and whatever the merits of the new ideology — and they are doubtful — neither Jesus nor his brother Judas Thomas can be presented as champions of the oppressed and downtrodden if we are to believe the *Acts of Thomas*. Its first verses record that Thomas was sold into slavery by the very Jesus whose "message of liberation" he is supposed to have brought to India. The *Acts* then describe how he enslaves the aristocratic women he converts and destroys their families. Finally we learn that this is the reason that King Mazdai of Parthia has him executed — and it is a good reason.

C.A. Simon seems not to have read the *Acts of Thomas* or heard the traditional Syrian Christian version of the apostle's

“good works” in India. In one of these tales St. Thomas only accepts Brahmins into his new creed — with the curious exception of one barber convert. This isolated soul is never given a place in the Christian community even during the apostle’s lifetime, and to present St. Thomas as a champion of the poor is ironical, even grotesque — but then Liberation Theology itself is proving to be just another means by which the Church can further exploit the faithful.

Indeed, the exploitation of the faithful has been going on from the very beginning. St. Paul returned the runaway slave Onesimus to his rightful owner Philemon — the *Epistle of Paul to Philemon* being the covering letter he sent with him — and St. Thomas is depicted in art with two slaves, two lions and a cloak of peacock feathers — hardly an image of a servant of the poor!

Today the number of lower caste converts to Christianity is myriad and they are no more accepted by their upper caste brethren than was their mythical first century barber ancestor. The plain truth is that the Churches of India are riddled with caste and to highlight this situation, Scheduled Caste Christians demonstrated against the untouchability practiced in the Church when Pope John Paul II visited India in 1986. They probably did not know that Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623) had sanctioned caste within the Indian Church and that his edict has never been rescinded. Earlier in 1599 the Council of Diamper and again in 1606 the Council of Goa had sanctioned the same. These sanctions have governed Catholic practice ever since — though Christians piously maintain that caste is contrary to Christ’s teachings.

The grievances of Scheduled Caste Christians remain to this day and often surface in the national press — to the embarrassment of wealthy bishops who have interests to protect other than those of their flock. This happened in July and August of 1990 in the columns of the *Indian Express*. On August 2nd a letter appeared by Raju Thomas of Madras. He held M.A., B.Th., B.D.

and M.Th. degrees, and wrote:

No self-respecting Scheduled Caste Christians will ask the Government to include them in the Scheduled Caste list. Is it not shameful for the Indian Church, even after centuries of Christian tradition, to say that it has a vast majority of untouchable Christians?

I myself come from a state where Christianity reached in the first century itself before it went to Europe, and that state, Kerala, the highly literate state in India, has more than 35 lakh untouchable Christians out of a total population of 51 lakh Christians. But these majority Scheduled Caste Christians do not have any voice in the Church administration and in the ecclesiastical structure.

The Christian population of India is just 3 per cent out of the 800 million total population of India, and 85 per cent of the Christians are from the Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Caste Christians, instead of asking for reservation on par with the Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Scheduled Castes, should demand that the Indian Church implement reservation first in their home itself. Charity should begin at home!

The Indian Christian Church has the best educational, technical and medical institutions in the country and it is unfortunate that the presence of the untouchable Christians in these prestigious institutions is worse than anywhere else. Why is the Indian Church blind to this brutal injustice and discrimination committed to its own family members?

While the Indian Church enjoys the minority rights guaranteed in the Constitution it violates the legitimate human rights of Dalit Christians. Instead of begging the Government, the Church must render justice to her own "least brothers and sisters" by sharing power and wealth with Scheduled Caste Christians in proportion to their population.<sup>1</sup> The Church must respond to the cries of the Dalit Christians.

Once justice is established at home the Church can put pressure on the Government of India to get the Constitution amended to help Scheduled Caste Christians to get the constitutional rights enjoyed by their Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist counterparts.

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1. Pope John Paul II has reaffirmed that the Church is an autocracy not a democracy — and that *he* is the present autocrat.

This letter — in places self-contradictive — shows an insensitivity to the position of Hindus and ignores the financial privileges enjoyed by the Church. Christian religious and educational institutions are fully autonomous and collect large foreign donations, unlike their Hindu counterparts which must accept state-controlled administrations and finance. That these foreign moneys collected in the name of the Scheduled Castes almost never reach the Scheduled Castes, is the cause of on-going scandal in churches of every denomination.

We did not comment on these issues in our reply to Raju Thomas. We had observed over the years that the *Indian Express* while permitting Christians to lecture Hindus in its columns, did not permit Hindus to comment on what it deemed to be Christian matters. But we did take issue with the assertion that Christianity had reached Kerala in the first century C.E. as this was a matter of Indian history. The *Indian Express* now had two copies of our reply to C.A. Simon's feature which it had declined to publish even in summary, as well as Swami Tapasyananda's article which it had simply ignored. There was no excuse for the *Indian Express* letters editor to allow Raju Thomas his claim unless he wished to provoke a response. We responded on August 3rd:

Mr. Raju Thomas may assert that he comes from an Indian state where Christianity was established in the first century C.E. (I.E. Aug. 2), but he must know that his claim has never been substantiated in history. Even the generous K.S. Latourette, in *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, does not allow the possibility of Christians coming to India by any route before the third century C.E.

The consensus among most historians who do not have a theological axe to grind, is that the first Christians to arrive in India, landing at Cranganore, Kerala, came in 345 C.E. They were four hundred refugees belonging to seven tribes of West Asia, who were fleeing religious persecution by the Persian Shapor II. Their leader was a Syrian who is known to history as Knae Thomman, Thomas Cananeus, Thomas of Cana, or Thomas the Merchant. It is probably



this man whom the Syrian Christians later converted into the first century apostle-martyr St. Thomas.

Though the myth of St. Thomas coming to Kerala in 52 C.E. was invented by Syrian Christians, it was resurrected and embellished in the sixteenth century by Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries who needed a pious story of persecution to cover up their own persecution of the Hindus. During this period they and their Portuguese masters destroyed the great Shiva temple on the Mylapore beach, the Murugan temple on Little Mount and the Vishnu temple on Big Mount, and built Christian churches on the ruins.

The Roman Catholic Church continues to promote this vicious tale as part of her ancient effort to vilify Hindus and malign Hinduism — and, of course, to support her religious and political claims to India. Those interested in the on-going campaign may refer to an excellent article by Swami Tapasyananda called "The Legend of a Slain Saint to Stain Hinduism" in the recent June issue of *The Vedanta Kesari* published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600004.

This letter was not published in the *Indian Express* but a copy of it had been sent to Raju Thomas. He replied on August 31st:

Thank you for the copy of your letter to the editor, *Indian Express*, Madras, dated 3 August 1990. I have been expecting that that letter would be published in the columns of the *Indian Express*. But so far it is not being published.

I have already posted a long letter on this issue as many people have come forward with the same question about the existing of Christianity in the first century in the Indian subcontinent.

Yes, Mr. Ishwar Sharan, I too agree with your views that Christianity did not exist in the first century in the Indian subcontinent. It is only a traditional belief that St. Thomas had come to India and converted the Brahmins to Christianity but this claim does not have any historical proof. However, this traditional belief of the Christians in Kerala is so deep-rooted that they relentlessly go on propagating it.

You may ask me if such is the case, why did I too assert that Christianity had come to India before it had reached Europe? My

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

answer to this question is that I deliberately wanted an open debate and discussion on this subject. But except a few nobody has come with challenging theories or written in the *Indian Express*. But why? We will be able to challenge and question such falsified histories and traditional beliefs only when we take up such issues to the public and do not keep them as the top secrets. But the question is: How many of our "intellectuals" are ready to have open-minded debates and discussions? Our sole aim is to eat, drink, make money and enjoy. This is the Indian reality. How many of us take up discussion on issues? We are concerned about the pension, non-supply of water, not getting facilities in the buses and trains, etc. Is this what a healthy society is to think and debate? I do not know.

I also agree with your opinion about the historicity of the Thomas Christians in Kerala in ancient Cheranadu. I also have some if not full soft corner towards your argument: "... this man whom the Syrian Christians later converted into the first century apostle-martyr St. Thomas." I am sure provided much light is shed on this argument the truth will certainly come out.

Do you know the real story of these Jerusalem Christians who had come to Kerala? Today their total number is 1,60,000 and 1 lakh within the Roman Catholic Church and 60 thousand in the Jacobite Church. It is also unfortunate that these Christians (?) do not maintain any kind of relationship with other Christians in India, no marital relationship, not giving baptism to non-Knaya Christians in their church, not allowing Dalit Christians in their houses, etc. They want to keep up the purity of their blood. In fact they are the worst enemies of the Dalits in Kerala.

Your other remarks on the Franciscans and the Jesuits, etc., have to be seriously studied. I am interested in this kind of research works. But do we have sufficient documents? I am very much enthusiastic to get that article, "The Legend of a Slain Saint to Stain Hinduism" by Swami Tapasyananda, published in *The Vedanta Kesari*. Would you help me to get one copy of this?

Thank you for writing to me. I welcome more enlightenment in these matters. I do not know whether the *Indian Express* will publish my letter which is a lengthy one.

The *Indian Express* did not publish Raju Thomas's letter even in an edited form, as it had not published ours. The *Indian*

*Express* did not approve of "issues" in its precious columns — especially as they were not perceived by the experts to add prestige or profits to the newspaper's already overflowing coffers. These were the "principles" of publishing followed by most big post-independence Hindu newspaper publishers. It was not that "nobody has come with challenging theories or written [to] the *Indian Express*" as Raju Thomas thought, but rather that they weren't published after numerous submissions. We replied to Raju Thomas on September 5th:

Thank you for the letter dated August 31st.

You will have received by now Swami Tapasyananda's article. He had originally submitted it to the *Indian Express*. They ignored it. After waiting three months he published the article in his own magazine.

I, too, submitted an essay debunking the myth of St. Thomas to the *Indian Express* in March. It was a reply to C.A. Simon's article which appeared in the *Express Weekend* last December. My submission was also ignored for months. Finally the *I.E.* resident editor rejected it in June with the lame excuse that he had no space and that I had already had my say in a letter published in the *Express Weekend*.

My latest letter replying to your statement on St. Thomas, is only one of many sent to the *Indian Express* over the last eight months. Many others have written also and I have copies of their letters. None of these letters have been published. I am sure that your letter will also not be published. My long experience is that the *Indian Express* only publishes material promoting the myth of St. Thomas as true Madras history (excepting for the three edited letters which appeared in the *Express Weekend* early this year).

The *Indian Express* consistently suppresses all material, no matter how well documented, that shows up this political tale for what it really is.

So you see, Mr. Thomas, the "fearless Jesuits" in that editorial office are no different from your priests and our politicians. They are full of grand rhetoric and promises of salvation which it does not cost them anything to make. But the moment they perceive that

the truth threatens their bank accounts and official positions, they are utterly ruthless in suppressing it and the persons who speak it. Gandhiji once said that it was cowardice that was the threat to our nation, not poverty. I believe he was right — again!

As it is, I am blacklisted at the *Indian Express* offices and none of my letters are published any longer. This will please many of their Christian readers, for I am a long-time student of Christian history and a critic of Church politics and ideology.

This should not be misunderstood to mean that I am hostile to Christians of faith. This is not the case at all. In fact I see the Christian layman as the first victim of Church politics. This is why I firmly believe that Christians activists like yourself must go to the Church for redress of your grievances before you go to the Government. To go to the Government is to let the Church off the hook. Why do that? What has the Church done for you really? The whole edifice of the Church is built on the emotional, psychological and material exploitation of the poor and ignorant.

You know better than I do that the Church has vast quantities of foreign money meant for the poor which never reaches the poor. You also know that caste is fully sanctioned within the Church. So-called saints like Francis Xavier, John de Britto and Robert de Nobili all practiced untouchability — not to mention the fabled St. Thomas! There is one — perhaps two — papal bulls sanctioning caste divisions in churches and social relations. And there are the edicts of the Council of Diamper which sanction the same. To argue that caste is un-Christian is really beside the point.

But to return to the original subject of this letter. My essay called *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple* is in the press but its publication has got delayed. It will be out in a month or so and I will send you a copy.<sup>2</sup> You will discover that I make no statement and draw no inference that I cannot document.

I am very happy that you have written to the *Indian Express* about this issue. And I am sorry that your letter will not get published. But because it will not be published I would very much like to

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2. The reference is to the first edition of this book which was published in February 1991. The observations made here about the editorial policy of the Madras edition of the *Indian Express* are as true today — June 1994 — as at the time of writing the letter in September 1990.

have a copy of it, if you would kindly send me one. I continue my study of this myth and am always eager for new references and points of view.

Raju Thomas did eventually send us a copy of his lengthy letter. It is a bitter indictment of the Roman Catholic Church and Church of South India for the discriminatory treatment that they have meted out to their Scheduled Caste converts. We do not include it here because it repeats in detail what he had already written to us on August 31st. But the *Indian Express* should have at least published edited portions of it including his retraction of the claim that St. Thomas had come to India. In the letter he quotes *Mathew 23:15* which applies as much to campaigning "secular" journalists as it does to Christian missionaries:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

## **ANTI-BRAHMINISM**

KOENRAAD ELST

The true prophets of the anti-Brahmin message were no doubt the Christian missionaries. In the sixteenth century, Francis Xavier wrote that Hindus were under the spell of the Brahmanas, who were in league with evil spirits, and that the elimination of Brahminism was the first priority in the large operation of bringing Salvation to the wretched Pagans of India. In this endeavour, he strongly advocated and practiced the use of force. Unfortunately for him, the Portuguese government could not always spare the troops which he so passionately asked for. Still, the destruction wrought by Francis Xavier was impressive, and he has described the joy he felt on seeing idols being smashed and temples demolished.

Within the Portuguese territories, physical persecution of Paganism naturally hit the Brahmins hardest. Treaties with Hindu kings had to stipulate explicitly that the Portuguese must not kill Brahmins. But in the case of Christian anti-Brahminism, these physical persecutions were a small matter compared to the systematic ideological and propagandistic attack on Brahminism, which has conditioned the views of many non-missionaries and has by now been amplified enormously because Secularists, Akalis, Marxists and Muslims have joined the chorus. In fact, apart from anti-Judaism, the anti-Brahmin campaign started by the missionaries is the biggest vilification campaign in world history.

While the Portuguese mission establishment was unanimous in branding the Brahmins as the chief obstacle to the Salvation of India, there was some dissent concerning the tactics to be employed against them. Robert de Nobili believed in fraud rather than force. He dressed as a Brahmin, and taught the "*Yesurveda*", a fifth *Veda* which had been lost in India, but which the emigrant community of "Romaka Brahmins" had preserved. He seems to have had a few followers, but after his death, nothing remained of his infiltration movement. Recently he has been declared the patron saint of the theology of inculturation,<sup>1</sup> and his method is being actualized and perfected in the "Christian ashrams".

De Nobili's approach was one possible application of the Jesuits' larger strategy, which aimed at converting the elite in the hope that they would carry the masses with them. This approach had been tried in vain in China, in Japan, and even at the Moghul court (today, it is finally meeting with a measure of success in South Korea). A practical implication of this strategy was that Christianity had to be presented as a noble and elitist religion. This came naturally to the Jesuits, who (unlike, for instance, the Franciscans) styled themselves as an elite order.

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1. Not only Robert de Nobili, but St. Thomas is being roped in as a mascot of inculturation. Ivan Fernandez, in "Hindu-Christian Dialogue Produces Results", in the Jesuit magazine *Jivan*, May-June 1994, New Delhi, writes, "Hindu scholars have for the first time accepted Christian contribution to Indian philosophy and conceded that Indian Philosophy does not necessarily mean Hindu Philosophy.... Some of the issues raised [in the symposium organised by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research and the Jesuit Philosophical Research Institute, Madras,] asked if there actually were Christian thinkers in the country. If so, what were their framework and concerns?... It is important to raise these issues since the Christian presence in India dates back to the beginning of the Christian era itself. Tradition says, St. Thomas the Apostle, who visited and preached in Kerala ... was martyred in Madras. 'This seminar is not just meant to prove Christian contribution but to demand one's membership in society as a grown up ...' says Anand Amaladass. 'Indian philosophy today cannot be considered the property of any one particular community in the country, even if its major contribution has come from, till now, the Hindu community.'"

Most importantly, that stage of missionary endeavour did not make use of any populist or democratic rhetoric of "equality". At that time, political equality was not yet on the ideological agenda. On the contrary, even when in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, equality became a political hot item, the Church opposed it tooth and nail, and supported the aristocratic *ancien regime* and its restoration after the fall of Napoleon. Only in the late nineteenth century, when atheist socialism lured the urban masses away from Christianity, did the Church evolve what is known as "the social teachings of the Church", formulated in encyclicals like *Rerum Novarum*. Before that time, any opposition of the Catholic Church (and of most Protestant Churches) against the caste system and the Brahmin caste had strictly nothing to do with a concern for social equality.

Recent claims that equality is an intrinsic and cardinal virtue of Christianity, and that the apostle Thomas came to India in A.D. 52 with a message of equality, abolition of caste, and women's rights, are so many lies. Thus, C.A. Simon writes: "The oppressed and downtrodden followed [St. Thomas] and claimed equal status in society as it was denied them by the prevailing social norms. He condemned untouchability and attempted to restore equal status for women." That St. Thomas ever came to India is already a myth, only kept alive in India with a lot of Christian-cum-secularist media effort; that he came with an Ambedkarist and feminist message is just ridiculous.

The source of the Thomas legend is an apocryphal text called the *Acts of Thomas*. If the [Jesuits and other Christian] missionaries want to continue to present it as history rather than legend, they should accept the consequences. In that case, they must tell the public about the way in which Thomas's journey to India started, according to the very same text: he left Palestine because his twin brother Jesus sold him as a slave (Thomas is also called Didymus, "the twin brother"). They must give details of the



destructive sorcery which Thomas practised, as in his first miracle, when he made a lion devour a boy for being impolite. They must tell the public that Thomas was put to death not by the ugly Brahmins but by the king who, after having had a lot of patience with him, and after offering him a safe exit from the country, decided to put a stop to his practice of luring women away from their homes and putting them in sackcloth and ashes behind locked doors, etc.

Briefly, if it is true that the apostle Thomas came to India, then the following information furnished by the *Acts of Thomas* is also true:

1. Thomas was an antisocial character;
2. Jesus was a slave trader;
3. Thomas was Jesus's twin brother, implying that the four canonical *Gospels* are unreliable sources which have concealed a crucial fact, viz. that Jesus was not God's Only Begotten Son. In fact, Jesus and Thomas were God's Twin-born Sons. In other words, accepting the Thomas legend as history is equivalent to exploding the doctrinal foundation of Christianity.

The original Christian doctrine on equality has been expressed by St. Paul, who opposed attempts by slaves to free themselves because "we have all been freed in Christ" and that should be enough. St. Paul's *Letter to Philemon* is actually a covering note which he sent along with a runaway slave whom he returned to the legal owner, the Christian convert Philemon.<sup>2</sup>

A Christian *Bible* commentary, *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* edited by David and Pat Alexander, admits: "Slavery was such an integral part of the social structure of the day that to preach freedom would have been tantamount to revolution.

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2. For St. Paul on slavery see *Ephesians* 6:5-9, *Colossians* 3:22-25 & 4:1, 1 *Timothy* 6:1-2, and *Philemon*. See also 1 *Peter* 2:18-25, which begins: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward."

Paul's brief was not to engage in political campaigning but to preach a Gospel capable of transforming human life from within." This is a poor excuse: religious pluralism was also an integral part of the dominant culture, and yet Christianity confronted and destroyed it. Why should God make compromises with the world? The fact of the matter is that St. Paul wanted to convert people to his own belief system, and that he was not interested in other, non-Salvationist pursuits such as social reform.

If the missionaries were sincerely unhappy with the institution of caste, it was not because of its intrinsic inequality. The problem with caste was that it offered a lot of communal togetherness, social security and a certain pride in one's caste identity. Through the missionary propaganda, we have come to see caste as an exclusion-from, but in the first place it is a belonging-to. Even for the lowest castes, humiliation by higher placed people on account of caste did not outweigh the considerable benefits of belonging to at least some caste. This caste cohesion is an important reason why Hinduism could survive where the cultures of West Asia disappeared under the onslaught of Islam. The missionaries found that people were not willing to give up their caste by converting to Christianity, which implied breaking with a number of caste customs. The only way to convert people, was to convert entire caste groups and allow them to retain some of their caste identity.

Therefore, far from abolishing caste, the Church allowed caste distinctions to continue even within its own structure and functioning. Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623) formally sanctioned caste divisions in the Indian Church. This papal bull confirmed earlier decisions of the local Church hierarchy in 1599 and 1606.

It is therefore not true that the Church's motivation in blackening the Brahmins had anything to do with a concern for equality. The Church was against equality in the first place, and even

when equality became the irresistible fashion, the Church allowed caste inequality to continue wherever it considered it opportune to do so. As a missionary has admitted to me: in Goa, many churches still have separate doors for high-caste and low-caste people, and caste discrimination at many levels is still widespread. Commenting on the persistence of caste distinctions in the Church, a Dalit convert told me: "I feel like a frog who has jumped from one muddy pool into another pool just as muddy."

Whenever the Church feels it should accommodate existing caste feelings in settled Christian communities, it accepts them; and whenever it thinks it profitable to take a bold anti-caste stand before a Dalit public, it will do just that. It is true that contemporary missionaries, who have grown up with the idea of social equality, mostly have a sincere aversion for caste inequality, and are more dependable when it comes to conducting Church affairs in a caste-neutral way (as opposed to Indian Christians who insistently claim descent from high-caste converts). But when considering the missionary machine as a whole, we must say that the missionary commitment to equality and social justice is not sincere, but is an opportunistic policy motivated by a greed for conversions.

In the past century, the Churches one after another came around to the decision that the lower ranks of society should be made the prime target of conversion campaigns. Finding that the conversion of the high-caste people was not getting anywhere, they settled for the low-castes and tribals, and adapted their own image accordingly. One implication was that the Brahmins were no longer just the guardians of Paganism, but also the antipodes of the low-castes on the caste ladder. A totally new line of propaganda was launched: Brahmins were the oppressors of the low-caste people.

In the proliferating mission schools, the missionary version of Indian history, including its view on caste, was taught to Indian

pupils, and many interiorized the hostile and motivated story which they had been fed. One of them was Jotirao Phule of Maharashtra, the first modern leader to be called Mahatma. His position, while not yet all-out anti-Hindu, was strongly anti-Brahmin. He wrote: "The Brahmin's natural (instinctive) temperament is mischievous and cantankerous, and it is so inveterate that it can never be eradicated."

Then again, the Aryan Invasion theory was the alpha and omega of the version of India history spread by anti-Brahminism.<sup>3</sup> Phule's book *Slavery* starts out with this view of history: "Recent researches have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Brahmins were not the Aborigines of India.... Aryans came to India not as simple emigrants with peaceful intentions of colonization, but as conquerors. They appear to have been a race imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning, arrogant and bigoted."

For Phule, there could be no progress for the low-caste people without taking harsh anti-Brahmin measures, e.g.: "Let there be schools for the Shudras in every village, but away with all Brahmin schoolmasters." This is exactly what the missionary school-builders wanted him to say. Through Phule, the missionary indoctrination has influenced all twentieth century anti-Brahmin leaders.

Even among the champions of the Hindu cause, anti-Brahminism acquired a following. The Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj rejected Brahminism and its heretical brainchildren, idolatry and the caste system, as utterly non-Vedic. Brahmin temples were desecrated in the name of Hinduism. Orthodox Brahmins were attacked as the traitors of Hindu interests.

Thus, it was said in those circles that when in the 1880s the

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3. It should be understood here that the theory has been proved to be false. See Shrikant G. Talageri's *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism* and K.D. Sethna's *Karpāsa in Prehistoric India: A Chronological and Cultural Clue*.

Maharaja of Kashmir wanted to reconvert the forcibly converted Muslims in his domains, the Brahmins rejected this timely proposal, arguing from their obscurantist *shastras* that one is only a Hindu by birth. This well-known allegation has been argued to be unhistorical (though of course nobody denies that mindlessly scripturalist Brahmins do exist, in dwindling numbers): it cannot be traced farther back than 1946, sixty years after the facts which it claims to describe. Admittedly, this *argumentum e silentio* is not strong in itself, but it is strengthened by the fact that Brahmins have reconverted ex-Hindus ever since the forcible conversions by Mohammed bin Qasim in A.D. 712. The ritual effecting conversion into the Arya fold has been available and in use since Vedic times.

There is ample Christian testimony from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century that the majority of converts were taken back into the Hindu fold, and that those who remained Christian were mostly "the individuals who, driven out of their castes on account of their vices or scandalous transgressions of their usages, are shunned afterwards by everybody" (quoted by Jeevan Kulkarni in *Historical Truths & Untruths Exposed*). The people affected by this conversion and reconversion process were mostly, but not exclusively, from the lower castes.

Just as well, the missionaries knew whom to hold responsible for their failure: "The Brahmin is therefore well worth looking at! We have more to do with him than with the Czar of all the Russians. The battle we have to fight with him is not against guns or rifles, not against flesh and blood." This assessment, written in a mood of vexation by Rev. Norman MacLeod in 1871, was comparatively mild next to what Abbe Dubois had written (and of which MacLeod approved) in 1820: "And there is no stronghold of evil so impregnable as Brahmins."

The well-spring of anti-Brahminism is doubtlessly the Christian missionaries' greedy design to rope in the souls of Hindus.

From there onwards, it spread through the entire English-educated class and ultimately became an unquestionable dogma in India's political parlance. Communist historians and sociologists have been fortifying it by rewriting Indian history as a perennial struggle between Brahmin oppressors and the rest. When defending the Mandal report in 1990, the then Prime Minister of India V.P. Singh could say that Brahmins have to do penance for the centuries of oppression which they inflicted on the Backwards, without anyone questioning his historical assumptions. Anti-Brahminism is now part of the official doctrine of the "secular, socialist" republic of India.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Excerpted from *Indigenous Indians: Agastya to Ambedkar*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1993.

## **CHURCHES THREATEN DALIT RIGHTS**

LEELA TAMPI

The two day convention of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe parliamentarians held in Delhi in June 1992 has taken the dismaying decision to give all support to the unremitting campaign of the Christian ecclesiastical leadership for the sharing of the special rights and benefits, mandated by the Constitution only for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, also by all Christians claiming Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe origin. This convention, with unseemly alacrity to serve this crusade of the powerful Christian religious leadership to usurp Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights, has insidiously asked the Government to "put an end to the discrimination against Scheduled Caste Christians by introducing a Bill in Parliament to include them also in the Scheduled Caste list".

This blatantly indefensible decision of the convention of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Members of Parliament which, if put into effect, will blight and doom for ever the still nascent advancement of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, deserves to be a matter of the gravest national concern. It also brings into tragic focus the lack of fealty of those Members of Parliament who supported the decision (mercifully there were many dissenters) to the sacrosanct cause of the welfare and progress of our Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, to protect which they were chiefly elected to Parliament.

What the Members of Parliament at this convention were

advocating was the amending of the Constitution to suit the prelates who have been vociferously demanding for the last several years the lion's share of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights and benefits for Christians. The Constitution has to be amended for their demand to be conceded because of the famous judgement of the full five-member Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court. In this final decision the Supreme Court had ruled that a person belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe lost his caste status — which pertains to the Hindu religion alone — upon his conversion to Christianity and therefore forfeited his entitlement to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe special rights and benefits. Because of this judgement the last census has listed only Christians and never "Scheduled Caste Christians".

Therefore the incontrovertible truth is that appellations that claim Scheduled Caste status for Christians such as "Harijan Christians", "Dalit Christians" and "Scheduled Caste Christians" that are annunciated by the prelates and their cohorts at every opportunity, besides being illegal, are a fraud perpetrated on the Constitution.

These terms, so evocative of suffering due to caste oppression, have been concocted by Christian vested interests in a consummate conspiracy to generate sympathy in the uninformed public mind for their cruel scheme of bilking the defenceless Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the major part of their special rights and benefits; also to promote the idea that Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe special rights can be shared also by Christians claiming Scheduled Caste origin, these special Scheduled Caste rights being just an ordinary welfare measure for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

But these special rights and benefits of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not a welfare scheme at all. They are quintessentially a restitution, which, as laid down by the Supreme



Court, only the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and no one outside the Hindu fold, can claim. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people from ancient times were the innocent victims of the all-pervasive stigma of low-caste: hence of discrimination, exploitation and oppression. It was as a minimal restitution for this deprivation and harrowing suffering directly resulting from their low caste status, of which vestiges still remain, that the special rights and benefits were mandated for them in the Constitution. It was hoped that the special rights and benefits would engender in them a sense of self-worth enabling them to compete with others in spite of the continuing handicap of low caste status. And indeed these special rights and benefits are acting as a tremendous help in their present arduous and dedicated struggle to rise towards equality with the rest of society.

Therefore it is scandalous that the elected representatives who should have been in profound empathy with the burgeoning aspirations of our Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and should have extended to them every protection and support in their hard struggle to lift themselves up from utter poverty, hopelessness and backwardness, actually did the very opposite by joining up with the opulent Christian establishment to dispossess their own people of the major part of their vitally needed special rights and benefits.

It is a tragic indication of the political degeneration that has set in at every level of this unfortunate nation that these so-called peoples' representatives, who have all along been exhorting us lesser mortals to uphold the sanctity of the Constitution and also drumming into our ears the vital need for every patriotic citizen to obey the law as clarified by the Court, had this sudden and convenient fit of amnesia on both these counts when it came to satisfying the demand of the prodigiously rich bishops — at the cost of the abysmally poor Dalits. What was done by these representatives

without any compunction was to throw the interests of their trusting, helpless people into the jaws of destruction.

Central to the issue of protection of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights from false claimants such as the so-called "Harijan Christians" and "Scheduled Caste Christians" is the obvious fact that there is no caste system in Christianity. Bound as Christianity is by its strict theology and sacerdotal rules, caste is as permanently extrinsic to it as temple worship. Moreover, it was by ranting and railing against the oppression of caste and reviling the Hindu religion for permitting it; and also by holding aloft the wonderful prospect of equality and brotherhood in Christ that a number of Scheduled Caste persons were persuaded to convert by the agents of the bishops. Now to trump up a case for the usurping of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights, the bishops are claiming that there is not only caste but also untouchability (as the much-used term "Harijan Christian" implies) in Christ. This is nothing but the basest trickery.

It is well-known that worldly and concrete benefits such as money, free education and jobs among other things were routinely given as rewards for conversion for the last hundred and fifty years and more. The converts, with such generous help from the British-supported, powerful Churches, advanced tremendously and are now ensconced in high positions in every sphere of national life.

In stark and tragic contrast our own Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people were, till about forty years ago, sunk in the most abject poverty and backwardness arising from their low-caste disability with no help from anywhere for advancement. Theirs was a story of heartrending and ceaseless misery. Continuing to suffer from the effects of centuries of abasement such as grinding poverty and backwardness, the help of the recently bestowed special rights and benefits has not been sufficient to lift the mass of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled

Tribes towards dignity and equality. Therefore the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes need the full quantum of restitution allotted to them to achieve equality which is the only means for benignant national reconstruction.

Hence it will be an intolerable betrayal of the cause of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes now engaged in a battle to attain dignity and equality, to allow millions of adherents of an alien, super rich, casteless religion to come crashing in and gobble up the largest part of the rights and benefits of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. And the onslaught of the new claimants will be uncontrollable for the simple reason that there is absolutely no foolproof method to verify any Christian's claim to Scheduled Caste origin. Therefore practically all the Christians in India will be able to claim Scheduled Caste status and pocket the benefits. As it is, numberless Christians, even from the advanced sections, are nonchalantly pilfering Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights by use of spurious or forged records, causing grievous loss and injury to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

To reduce opposition among the public to their inhumane campaign the bishops and their henchmen are duplicitously spreading the impression that the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe benefits are something infinite and will expand limitlessly to accommodate even millions of new claimants with no loss to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

This is a pernicious falsehood. The quota of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe benefits such as job reservation is in strict ratio to their present population and cannot be expanded at all. Taking Kerala as an example, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Kerala, on the basis of their population ratio, have eight percent job reservation and twelve Members of the Legislative Assembly. If this claim of the Christian vested interests is enacted as law, nearly all the Christians in Kerala, who outnumber

the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes many times and are incomparably more advanced, will at once snatch away all the benefits, leaving the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes out in the freezing cold to perish. Also the Christians, being immensely more powerful politically (being so well organized under the mighty Churches) will also bag all the twelve Member of the Legislative Assembly seats. Thus every avenue for the cruelly double-crossed Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to progress, or even to voice their protest, will be closed for ever. Soon they will face a fate worse than in olden times. As planned by Christian interests, this will lead to a situation where the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have to convert or perish: which will open the floodgate of their cultural genocide.

This convention of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe representatives repeated the utterly false statement of the bishops in declaring that the Government was discriminating against the "Scheduled Caste Christians". Firstly, there is no such entity as "Scheduled Caste Christians". Secondly, the discrimination in India is in favour of the Christians — of every type. Wherever Christians have gained majority and ascendancy in India as in the North-East, non-Christian minorities are being discriminated against most cruelly. In the rest of India all Christians, including the so-called Scheduled Caste Christians are being coddled and pampered in the name of minority rights. The truth is that globally Christians are the most powerful majority with the minority Christians in India making determined use of their extra-territorial affiliations to secure maximum political and financial clout.

In addition to these enormously lucrative minority privileges which the Churches receive and enjoy — keeping all of it to themselves exclusively with no thought of sharing with the Scheduled Castes or any one else — are the mammoth funds that are flowing from abroad into the coffers of the Churches and other Christian institutions. It is said that the Churches in Kerala

alone are receiving nearly a thousand crore rupees every year in foreign funding. It should be noted that the declared purpose for much of the remittances is to render assistance to the needy among the Christians.

As the prelates, in spite of this, are constantly pleading the poverty of the "Scheduled Caste Christians" (and by implication their inability to help them) as the excuse to gouge the rights of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, we are constrained to take a passing look, even if hopelessly perfunctory and incomplete, at the stupendous wealth of the Churches in order to demonstrate the deceit involved. The Roman Catholic Church, which spread all over the world under the aegis of the European colonial armies, is the most formidable accumulator of wealth the world has ever seen. And the Roman Catholic Church in India is an integral part of this Roman Catholic Imperium (for example, all the archbishops and bishops in India are appointed by the Vatican, and coded instructions are sent to them every day) whose stocks of gold ingots in the vaults of Fort Knox are second only to that of the Government of the United States of America. Experts on Vatican finances declare she has similar stocks in Europe also. And this is just the minutest part of the movable and immovable wealth of the Catholic Church which is stated to be so vast as to be beyond all rational assessment.

In India the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches taken together form the largest and richest landlord, second only to the Government. In British times with the patronage of the colonial rulers the Churches amassed vast fortunes in the shape of religious and institutional property and huge areas of priceless urban land; all this in addition to vast tracts of agricultural land and other assets. After independence, because of the continuing phenomenal influence of the Church leadership over the Central and State Governments, the wealth of the Churches continued to multiply. It will be scarcely an exaggeration to say that by now

their wealth has increased more than a thousand times.

The Churches again have deftly and astutely established a stranglehold on education, raking in thousands of crores every year from the Government as well as public. In addition to the massive cathedrals and churches all over India whose value is beyond assessment, the Churches — especially the Roman Catholic Church — own thousands of schools, colleges, nunneries and monasteries and other institutions too numerous to mention. They also have vast holdings in real estate such as shopping complexes, office buildings and other commercial property. The extent of their movable property such as bank deposits, industrial stocks and shares — to mention just a few — naturally has to be equally impressive. And let us not forget the rivers of gold flowing into their coffers every year from the wealthy West. Altogether it can only be said that no matter how it is told, the list of the riches of the Churches will still only be the tip of a huge iceberg — an iceberg carefully kept submerged and hidden from view.

When all Christians, including those falsely labelled as Scheduled Caste Christians, are having exclusive enjoyment of this limitless wealth, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes existing in numbing poverty are not getting the tiniest benefit out of it. Thus those Christians who are bent on snatching away the meagre benefits of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes besides eating their rich cake and keeping it, are also trying to steal the gruel from the half empty bowls of their starving Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe neighbours. This is not loving one's neighbours. It is destroying them out of sheer greed.

As for the bishops and archbishops, who are enjoying incomes running into millions and reside in palaces in the utmost pomp and luxury, to organise this unscrupulous, pitiless campaign at the cost of crores for the purpose of grabbing hold of the paltry benefits of the impoverished Scheduled Castes and Scheduled

Tribes who are eking out a miserable existence in leaking hovels, is, to say the least, diabolical. It is in fact the second Inquisition.

At the same time we have to note that the prelates have never brought up the matter of "Brahmin Christians" or "Kayastha Christians" and demanded Brahmin and Kayastha rights for them. So it is plain for all to see that there is a well-calculated scheme behind this campaign to legalise the systematic plunder of Dalit rights and thereby cripple them forever. At present the law (as stated earlier) is that a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe person will forfeit his special benefits on conversion as Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe caste status (and not poverty or anything else) is the only criterion for the benefits. This is perceived by the ecclesiastical leadership bent on aggressive proselytization as an irritating hurdle to their well-laid plans for mass conversions.

But if the law is changed (through Constitutional amendment) to entitle any Christian claiming Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe origin to receive the special Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rights — which will of course be in addition to the munificent rewards paid out by the Churches for conversion — then conversion of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes can take place all over India on a massive scale.

Then the vote banks under the command of the bishops will take a quantum jump. Vulnerable areas — assisted if need be by armed insurrections as in the North-East — can be turned into the fiefs of the prelates. And slowly but surely the ancient religion and culture of India — and our precious national identity — can be subverted, extirpated and supplanted by colonial Christianity, enabling the prelates to bask in even greater opulence, power and grandeur.

Here then the plain unvarnished truth is that it is the insatiable greed for dominion over ever larger territories in India



through rapid evangelisation that is the far-reaching and sinister motive behind this perverse campaign of the Christian vested interests to usurp the rights and benefits of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is religious corruption and banditry unequalled even in colonial times.

For Christians in need of financial assistance, the right course to follow will be to insist on the fair sharing of the mammoth funds and properties of the Churches among all Christians. While they are attempting this, they can obtain assistance, like other non-Dalit Indians, from Government welfare schemes. But most certainly it is not the responsibility of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes — the poorest of the nation's poor — to undertake at the sacrifice of their welfare and also that of generations yet unborn — the task of making the followers of the Churches — the richest of the rich — richer. Thus it will be dishonourable and detestably wicked on the part of the Christians to snatch away the rights of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes which they need for their very survival.

The time has come for all nationalistic citizens of India, especially the Hindus, to acknowledge the immeasurable and eternal debt of gratitude they owe to their brethren of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who, even when suffering untold privation and humiliation, did not succumb to the enticements offered by a foreign religion implacably inimical to the religion of India; and chose with confidence and faith to remain in the Hindu fold: which has indeed been for the greater good of this nation.

Thus it is the bounden duty of all those who are devoted to our holy motherland — and all She signifies — to come forward with resolve and determination to protect the interests of our brothers and sisters of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which interests are now in such mortal danger, from inside as well as outside.



Similarly it is the first duty of all Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assemblies profoundly committed to the hallowed cause of the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes — the weakest and most vulnerable sections of our society — to throw aside all blandishments, and with probity and fidelity to work for this great cause by battling against the Christian vested interests who are waging this war of attrition on the helpless, defenceless Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

When we watch, horror-struck, the stupendously rich prelates inflicting this new Inquisition on the abysmally poor Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with the intention of snatching away their rights, we begin to understand that these prelates do not by any means subscribe to the exhortation of Christ to sell one's riches and give the proceeds to the poor.

It is the most binding responsibility of the nation to protect and also ensure the sacred rights and benefits of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for as long as they are needed: not only for the benefit of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes but also for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

For the truth is that assured and continued welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is the very heartbeat of the nation.



## PART FIVE



## HIDEAWAY COMMUNALISM IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS

The letters that follow were exchanged between us and the Madras *Indian Express* resident editor K.V. Ramanathan in June 1990. Up to this time we had firmly believed that our essay on the myth of St. Thomas, written in reply to C.A. Simon's article, would receive due consideration at the *Indian Express* and would appear in some appropriate form in the newspaper. When this did not happen even three months after submission and when a query sent to the assistant editor C.P. Seshadri<sup>1</sup> was ignored, we sent a registered letter to K.V. Ramanathan on June 1st:

Enclosed is a copy of the article on the St. Thomas myth which I sent by registered post on March 9th to Mr. Seshadri. A query concerning its publication was sent later and never replied to.

This article has been accepted by a respected publisher and will appear in a few months time as a book entitled *Saint Thomas: The Man, the Church and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*.<sup>2</sup>

I am currently expanding the material, and on page four of the revised script will add the footnote, "This article was written in reply to C.A. Simon's 'In Memory of a Slain Saint' which appeared in the *Express Weekend* of 30 December 1989. It has not been published to date nor has the *Indian Express* resident editor

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1. This editor has been at the Madras office of the *Indian Express* for "the last hundred years" and has seen as many resident editors as he has years pass by his table going out the door. He vets all letters to the editor and decides on much of the material that appears in the Madras edition of the newspaper.

2. The title was changed to *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*. The article submitted to the *Indian Express* was called *What the Historians Say About Saint Thomas*.

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

at Madras replied to the author's queries."

It is not my wish to be unfair to you or the newspaper, and your comments or advice concerning the above note are welcome.

On the other hand, if you do intend to publish the article, or rather a summary of it as the full text cannot appear in a newspaper, then the same should be indicated to me within the next two weeks as I have a deadline to meet.

After months of silence, this letter elicited a response from the *Indian Express*. K.V. Ramanathan replied to it on June 11th:

Your letter dated the 1st of June.

I find that *Express Weekend* carried on 13th of January a letter from you commenting on Mr. C.A. Simon's "In Memory of a Slain Saint." We have also published letters from Swami Tapasyananda<sup>3</sup> and Mr. Ved Prakash on the same subject. It is not as if, therefore, the *Indian Express* refused to give space to your point of view. The availability of space being a severe constraint, *Express Weekend* finds it very difficult indeed to publish long articles. You yourself concede in the last paragraph of your letter that the full text of your article cannot appear in a newspaper. We believe that having published your letter there is really no need for us to publish a summary of your article also.

Now it is a fact of newspaper publishing that the editor has the prerogative of rejecting material that he does not wish to publish, and this right is strictly exercised in India where the editor usually seeks to mold public opinion rather than inform it. But given the reputation of the *Indian Express* as a fair-minded newspaper, we decided to do some plain speaking to this editor who equated a letter to the editor with a grossly misleading front page article and would thus absolve himself of further responsibility to the public. Opening our reply with the verses of

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3. Ramanathan had confused Tapasyananda with Jyotirmayananda whose letter was published on February 10th. But the mistake reveals that he was aware of Swami Tapasyananda's article which had been sent to him three months earlier.

Jnanasambandar and Arunagirinathar quoted by Swami Tapasyananda — who rightly maintained that “the Christian ecclesiastics’ contention can be proved to be fraudulent with this single evidence” — we wrote on June 25th:

As you have bothered to reply to me with your letter of June 11th, I have asked Voice of India to alter the footnote<sup>4</sup> in my essay on St. Thomas and the Kapaleeswara Temple. But I do not know where the book is in the press and you may be too late with your sorry letter of rejection.

Your contention that I have had opportunity to have my say in a letter to the editor of the *Express Weekend* published on January 13th, is not acceptable. I need hardly tell you that a front page article presented as true history in a trusted newspaper is not refuted simply because a reader writes to the editor. Moreover the important last paragraph of my letter was cut out, which caused Swami Jyotirmayananda to write a letter which carried a serious mistake in meaning, which in turn caused Mr. Ved Prakash to write a correction. Those last two letters and the confusion caused by them would not have been made had the *Express Weekend* not deliberately tried to suppress the truth about the original Kapaleeswara Temple and the St. Thomas Church.

I am aware that you have a shortage of space in the *Indian Express*. That is exactly why my essay has been written as it is. Any sub-editor can pick out the material wanted and summarise it without distorting my point of view or conclusions. You may not consider this point of view to be of any value, but it is supported by over forty references named in the article itself.

Aside from poor Marco Polo, where are Mr. C.A. Simon’s references? And was his article only a point of view too? And why are you hiding this Mr. Simon so that nobody can write him an opinion?<sup>5</sup>

I note that you did not lack any space in the *Indian Express* when he decided to tell his lies about the Hindus. It may be the truth that the Roman Catholic Church can buy the space she needs from you.

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4. The footnote was deleted.

5. The *Express Weekend* editor S. Viswanathan eventually sent C.A. Simon’s address by post.

I of course cannot. I can only write letters to the editor.

Mr. Harry Miller stated in his column of January 29th that St. Thomas came to India. You did not lack space for this point of view but you also did not publish the letters refuting it. At least two letters were sent to you and him with supporting material. Again on April 23rd you carried an item about a cross planted in Kerala by St. Thomas, and again at least one letter was sent to you pointing out that this was not possible. This letter, too, was not published.

So the truth of the matter is that you do indeed have space to promote this ancient lie about St. Thomas coming to India to get killed by the wicked Hindus and especially the very wicked Brahmins, but that you have no space at all in your newspaper when somebody tries to unmask the fable (except for the three letters already referred to).

Swami Tapasyananda did not get a letter published in the *Express Weekend* as you have stated, but he has written his own article in *The Vedanta Kesari*.<sup>6</sup> What he says cannot be ignored. And what Dr. R. Nagaswamy said in *The Hindu* on April 30th cannot be ignored either. Both are respected authorities in their respective fields.

Your letter of the 11th is disappointing for me. I did believe that I would eventually get fair treatment at the *Indian Express*. But this aside, what is really distressing is that it appears that you not only connive at this vicious lie being published in your paper to malign the Hindus, but that you actively support it by suppressing the truth no matter how often or in what form it is presented to you.

The resident editor K.V. Ramanathan was not the only one at the *Indian Express* to hear from us. We had also sent letters to the Madras assistant editor C.P. Seshadri and to the editor-in-chief Arun Shourie at New Delhi. To C.P. Seshadri we wrote in part:

When Mr. Shourie can expose the sordid history of Muslim iconoclasm, why is the same Christian history always covered up in your

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6. We did not know at the time of writing this letter that Swami Tapasyananda's article had also been submitted to the *Indian Express*.



newspaper? After all, Muslims borrowed their violent ideology from the Christians and Jews. Aurangzeb is nobody in comparison to St. Francis Xavier when it comes to temple-breaking and bloodshed. Yet Muslims today must bear public criticism for their past while the Christians get off free. Why is that?

And to Arun Shourie we wrote in part:

It seems clear from a number of articles published and from the letters of protest or criticism sent to the Madras editor and suppressed (of which I have knowledge — obviously many more letters were received by the editor), that the editor responsible for the material published in the *Express Weekend* has consistently pursued a policy of promoting Roman Catholic doctrine at the expense of historical truth.... The manipulation of history and the suppression of facts is a major issue in this country.... Christians, Muslims and Communists know how to write history and then how to rewrite it to suit their current ideological needs. When the *Indian Express* covertly supports one of these parties — in this case the Roman Catholics — in rewriting Indian history, the affair becomes a matter of grave concern to everybody.... The Roman Catholic Church is the richest, largest and most sophisticated private publisher in India and the world. But this is not enough for them. They need the name of a fair-minded and respected daily to give their lies ... credibility — and unfortunately for the people of Madras they have found this in the *Indian Express*.

Arun Shourie had written about historical evidence and those who conceal it in "Hideaway Communalism" in the *Indian Express* on 5 February 1989. In the context of the myth of St. Thomas, his questions could be directed at journalists and he could be defining the self-interest of Roman Catholic bishops. He asks, "Will we shed our evasions and concealments? Will we at last learn to speak and face the whole truth?... To see that these 'leaders' are not interested in facts, not in religion ... but in power, in their personal power, and in that alone? That for them religion is but an instrument, an instrument which is so attractive because the cost of wielding it falls on others, on their followers, and not on them?"

In an earlier paragraph he could be writing about the editors of our national English-language dailies when he says, "That is the significant thing; they have known [the evidence] and their impulse has been to conceal and bury rather than ascertain the truth."



Arun Shourie lost his job at the *Indian Express* because he told the truth.<sup>7</sup> And, what he wrote in 1989 in "Hideaway Communalism" is as true today — June 1994 — at the *Indian Express* as when we quoted it in the first edition of this book in February 1991. C.P. Seshadri remains at his table vetting letters to the editor and S. Sapru, reportedly an economist, is the present resident editor. On 1 January 1994 they gave a prominent place to the following letter from S. Chandrasekaran of Cheyyar:

The *Bible* says, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the King, behold, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem saying where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. They saw the young child ... and fell down and worshipped Him ... they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh." (*St. Matthew* 2:1-11.)

Western scholars argue that the Wise Men were Persian Magi, the members of a priestly class or the magicians. However, they cite no evidence, probably not knowing that the more appropriate country in the East from where they proceeded to Bethlehem should be India.

The Wise Men were definitely the brilliant astronomers of India.

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7. He is remembered in Madras with much affection and respect by *Indian Express* readers.

### *Hideaway Communalism in the Indian Express*

Among the eastern countries only in India Wise Men were found with astronomical talents. Also, the availability of gifts presented by the Wise Men to infant Jesus is abundant in India and not Persia.

The last but not the least proof is that in corresponding to the onward march of Wise Men from India to Judea, within not less than half a century, St. Thomas a disciple of Jesus Christ, made a downward march from Judea, superseded Persia and reached India to sow the seed of Christianity.

The Wise Men who went to Bethlehem to see Jesus were in all probability Indians and not Persians or any others. Is there anything to counter this possibility?

This letter was obviously a plant, i.e., the covert dissemination of an idea, usually placed in a newspaper with the connivance of the editor. It was written by a mischief-maker or clever Christian propagandist — S. Chandrasekaran would prove to be a shameless negationist as well — and we replied to it that same day, as did K.V. Ramakrishna Rao. As our letters are long and repetitious of arguments already presented in this book, only the edited versions which appeared in the *Indian Express* on January 4th are reproduced here. We wrote:

Dr. Chandrasekaran may be right in his proposition that the three Wise men who went to Palestine to offer gifts to the infant Jesus were Indians (I.E. Jan. 1). But the onus lies on him to provide proofs for his thesis and not pretend that it stands proved until somebody comes along and refutes it.

Citing the legend of St. Thomas as a "last but not least proof" for the Wise Men's journey west, is unacceptable because there is no proof that St. Thomas came to India.

Dr. Chandrasekaran's letter, which is obviously a plant, is apparently part of the effort to establish this anti-Hindu fable as history.

And K.V. Ramakrishna Rao wrote:

One can't divine Dr. Chandrasekaran's purpose in writing the letter. It contains nothing but unhistorical legends and myths.

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

As the Christian era that we follow is itself unscientific, purely based on religious dogma, now historians have started using the notations B.C.E. and C.E. (Before Common Era and Common Era). The alleged visit of St. Thomas to India is another myth floated by vested Christian missionaries.

If Chandrasekaran's purpose for writing the letter couldn't be exactly divined, neither could the purpose of the *Indian Express* for publishing it. As we had started work on the revision of this book and were interested in understanding *Indian Express* editorial policy, we sent a letter to the resident editor S. Sapru, with a copy to C.P. Seshadri, on January 3rd:

I am working on a new edition of my book *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*, which is being reorganised and expanded. Letters and articles currently appearing in the *Indian Express* will be included in it under appropriate headings.

If you or Mr. Seshadri wish to explain to a concerned public your editorial policy regarding the selection and publication of Letters to the Editor, I would be happy to consider including your statement in the new edition.

I have been critical of your policies in the past and remain critical of them today (especially when you publish untruthful or provocative items and then refuse to publish rejoinders), nevertheless, I am taking this opportunity to say that I do think the *Indian Express* is the best of the English-language papers being published in the country today.

This letter was a mistake. Though we were sincere and had sent it in good faith, it is as much the nature of newspaper editors to exploit the trust of their readers as it is the nature of missionaries to exploit the trust of the helpless and weak, and we had unwittingly invited these editors to exploit not only their readers but their readers' children. Sapru and Seshadri replied to our letter by publishing a four-colour three-column feature on St. Thomas and related Christian historical items on their children's page on February 18th. The material was attributed to the 1992

edition of the *Limca Book of Records* and read:

**FIRST TO PREACH CHRISTIANITY:** Apostle St. Thomas (Thomas Didaemus) arrived in India in 52 A.D. by the northwestern route and preached Christianity until his death. He was the first to preach Christianity in India.

**OLDEST CHURCH IN EXISTENCE:** St. Thomas is believed to have established a small church at Mylapore in Madras in 52 A.D. where he was killed. Today's Santhome Church reportedly stands near the earlier site

**FIRST CHRISTIAN COLONY:** In 345 A.D. Thomas Cana, a Syrian merchant, came to Travancore and established a Christian colony.

**FIRST JESUIT MISSIONARY:** Saint Francis Xavier, a Spanish national who landed at Goa was the first Jesuit missionary. He established the first Christian colony in Goa in 1542.

**FIRST JEWISH COLONY:** In 68 A.D. 10,000 Jewish refugees emigrated from Jerusalem to the Malabar coast after the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem ...

The list continues with "First Bishop" and "First Cardinal" but we have reproduced the relevant items. Not one of them is historically true except for the reference to Thomas of Cana — which is also not proved. St. Thomas did not come to India and St. Francis Xavier did not establish the first Christian colony in Goa. When a history professor saw this article in the *Indian Express* he remarked, "The *Limca Book of Records* is the 'Coca-Cola Book of Lies' — Limca being a trademark of Coca-Cola."

We did not respond to this feature. By taking the St. Thomas controversy to the children's page, the *Indian Express* had effectively put an end to any further debate. They had done this for exactly the same reason that *The Hindu* had done so earlier (as will be seen in the next chapter). First, nobody can take issue with articles that appear on the children's page; and second, the editors were showing their contempt for our position and ridiculing

the plea that we had made in the first edition of this book —that the true history of old Mylapore be studied by unbiased professionals and recorded for our children.

But if the *Indian Express* did not hear from us again on the subject of St. Thomas, they too did not refrain from further promoting the legend at a given opportunity. On April 25th another feature on St. Thomas appeared above a large photo of some Kerala-style tiled roofs with loud-speakers attached to the eaves. It was by Samson Aseervatham of Nagercoil who wrote:

For a church it is tiny. But it has a "halo" of its own as it is considered the oldest church in the East. The 45 ft. by 10 ft. church was erected by St. Thomas, one of the twelve followers of Christ, at Thiruvithancodu.

The Apostle is said to have landed in A.D. 52 at Kodungallur on the west coast of South India.

St. Thomas raised seven and a "half" churches on the west coast before his departure to Mylapore, Madras. The Thiruvithancodu church, which has the original base and structure intact, is considered as being "half" because of its size.

The other seven churches are in Kerala: Malayankara, Parur, Palayur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Kurakonikollam. Of this, only the Niranam church is extant.

All the churches that St. Thomas built were dedicated to St. Mary. The one in Thiruvithancodu was raised on twenty cents of land given as a gift by the King of Venad. Thiruvithancodu was the capital then. It later expanded its territory and came to be known as Travancore.

The church was built entirely with neatly dressed rocks, and resembles a village temple. The tiled roof is a much later addition.

On Sundays, Syrian Christians throng here for worship. Prayers are recited in Syriac and Malayalam. The ancient church is under the direct control of the Catholic Orthodox Syrian Church at Kottayam.

K.V. Ramakrishna Rao's comment on this piece was published in the *Indian Express* on May 2nd:

Except the structure, which is quite recent, all claims made about the so-called "half-church" of St. Thomas in the write-up "Small and beautiful" (I.E. April 25), are totally unhistorical.

Samson Aseervatham has every right to believe that St. Thomas came to India. Some believe that Jesus Christ preached in Benares and died in Kashmir. But there is no historical evidence for such myths floated by the Portuguese.

About the St. Thomas myth in India and his "seven and a half churches", T.K. Joseph, in his book *Six St. Thomases of South India* has shown how missionaries were engaged in spreading the myth by planting relics, forging documents and writing "histories" in their own way.

The fact is that all the churches mentioned by the writer were previously Hindu temples which were converted into churches. In fact, even today they are either situated in or around the temple premises.

In 1990 the *Indian Express* allegedly had no space in which to publish a reply to C.A. Simon's St. Thomas article. In 1994 it has found a surplus of space in which to publish articles promoting the St. Thomas story. Editor Sapru has said (I.E. Feb. 25) that "the ultimate lord and master of the newspapers is the market place". If this is so — and ethics no longer have any place in journalism and newspaper publishing — then who is paying for this space? Is it the Jesuits — who own the world's largest bank, the Bank of America, with branches in India — or the Church of Rome? And if nobody pays, is telling the same old lie over and over again really so profitable?

## HIDEAWAY COMMUNALISM IN THE HINDU

Whatever the faults of the *Indian Express* today, it had an honourable beginning and still has some of the moral authority it acquired in the Freedom Movement. This is not true of *The Hindu* which was established with the sole objective of making money from the Raj. It was known as "The Sapper" prior to 1947 — even the British-owned *Mail* was more nationalistic — and after the White Sahib went away it was called — and is still called — "The Old Widow of Mount Road". Its formula for success is a studied, high-tech mediocrity — name and form and no content — and a faithful toeing of the government line. It is class-conscious, casteist and fashionably anti-Hindu. Its "moral" response to any media-created national crisis — such as the demolition of an unauthorised building in Ayodhya — is to fill its columns with the lugubrious drivel of various popular Marxist professors. In short, *The Hindu* is self-righteous and boring unless one is looking for a suitable girl for a middle class boy with B.Com. and a Green Card.

This is not only our view. A Christian missionary and social activist from Kerala who charges that Hindu civilization is exhausted and decadent, points a finger at *The Hindu* as a living example of this alleged condition. He says that we don't have to worry about Christian missionaries undermining Hindu culture when we have established opinion-setters like this at work in our midst.

All this by way of introduction to a hallowed Madras institution.



We were quiet innocent of its ways when we sent a copy of the St. Thomas myth book to *The Hindu* in 1991. At the same time we sent a copy to Dr. T. Edmunds of T.B.M. Lutheran College at Porayar, Tamil Nadu. He replied and suggested that we ask *The Hindu* to let him do the review. We agreed, happy that a professional historian had taken an interest in the book, and wrote *The Hindu* book editor on April 3rd:

Some days ago I sent you a copy of *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple* for review.

A copy of the book was also sent to Dr. T. Edmunds at the T.B.M. Lutheran College at Porayar 609307. He has just replied and suggests that I request you to allow him to review the book for *The Hindu*.

I do not know Dr. Edmunds but suspect that he may be the competent person to do the review, and therefore request that you consider contacting him for it.

This letter was replied to by "special correspondent" C.V. Gopalakrishnan on April 6th:

This is in reply to your letter of April 3rd, regarding review of *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*.

The decision to review books sent to *The Hindu* and the choice of the reviewer rest with the Editor.

This letter was unexpected and unnecessary. We had only made a suggestion which may or may not be followed up. It did indicate though that the editor did not want the review. We would learn soon enough that the book page editor was C.V. Gopalakrishnan himself.

But if his note was unexpected, what was to follow a week later was a real surprise. On April 13th *The Hindu* published a four-colour seven-panel cartoon feature on its children's page called "The Story of Madras". It was illustrated by Lalitha and scripted by a director of the newspaper, Nandita Krishna, who

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

wrote:

Mylapore had several famous foreign visitors. Let us see who they were.

One of the minor apostles of Jesus Christ, Thomas Dydimus (or St. Thomas) preached the Gospel on the beaches of ancient Mylapore in the 1st century A.D. It is believed that he was buried here in A.D. 72.

Marco Polo visited St. Thomas' church and tomb in "ancient Mcliapore" in 1293.

The Arabs visited Betumah ("the Town of Thomas") in the 9th century and the Nestorian Christians in the 10th century. The latter built a church over St. Thomas' tomb. In the 16th century, the Portuguese shifted the tomb and built a basilica — San Thome Cathedral — at the present site.

But St. Thomas did not live in Mylapore. It is believed that he lived in a cave at Little Mount, prayed and preached here, and took a daily walk to the beach at Mylapore ...

And died on St. Thomas Mount, where the Nestorians built a church which the Portuguese re-built and to which the Armenians made additions.

The church contains a painting of the Virgin Mary, said to have been the work of St. Luke, who gave it to St. Thomas to bring to Madras.

In the 16th century, the competition between the Portuguese and the Dutch to secure a port in Chola Mandalam, a province of the Vijayanagar Kingdom, and today's Madras, sent the price of pepper up by 5 shillings. So 24 merchants in London started a trading company, the East India Company, to corner the Indian trade. The action was to change the course of Indian history.

Except for the last reference to the East India Company, none of these statements are true — or wholly true, for the feature is a most deceitful mixture of fact and fiction. And because it appeared on the children's page when we had made a specific and sincere appeal that our children be told the plain truth about Mylapore, we felt that the editors of *The Hindu* — be they

Kasturi or Ravi or Ram in 1991 — and Nandita Krishna were simply being spiteful. We decided to let them know that we knew what they were about and sent a letter to the editor on April 20th:

Apropos of the colour feature about St. Thomas (Young World, April 13), I am reminded of Mark Twain's observation that "a lie can travel half-way around the world before truth can put its trousers on".

My book about the myth of St. Thomas was sent to you in good faith, with the hope that it would receive fair treatment at the hands of a competent reviewer of your choice, and I must confess that I did not expect from *The Hindu* the spiteful response that this feature by Nandita Krishna represents.

"Special correspondent" C.V. Gopalakrishnan kept quiet this time and did not reply to us.

Nandita Krishna was not only being spiteful of course. She was declaring the policy of her newspaper — which appears to be the wholesale revision of Indian history<sup>1</sup> in order to extract yet more money out of a gullible middle class with the marketable commodity of "Hindu tolerance" (which is falsely presented as being Hinduism's essence).<sup>2</sup> That she should publish in her paper at all raises a serious question of ethics. Directors and publishers should not write in their own newspapers. This is an old, old rule. But perhaps most unfortunate of all is that *The Hindu* editors have shown themselves to be opportunists, a charge levelled at journalists because they often take undue advantage of a given circumstance when looking for the good chance.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Jesus the twin brother of St. Thomas warns us

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1. *The Hindu* is fully aware that the St. Thomas story is false and that the Kapaleeswara Temple was destroyed by the Portuguese in order to build San Thome Cathedral. We know this because some of the documents referred to when researching this book have come from *The Hindu* files.

2. Hinduism's essence is not *tolerance* but *Ishwara*, *Dharma* and *Satya*.

3. It is because journalism is so exploitive of people and events that the only redeeming feature of the profession is the moral obligation to tell the truth.

against these pretentious, greedy scribes when he says in *Mark* 12:38-40:

Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widow's houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

## MADRAS MUSINGS AND OTHER MEDIA MEDITATIONS

Madras has two major English-language dailies, *The Hindu* and *Indian Express*, and a growing number of special interest community journals. The best known of these small publications is *Madras Musings*, a Catholic-owned fortnightly published by Anu Varghese and edited by S. Muthiah. Muthiah is a Sri Lanka-returned journalist who is described in an *Indian Express* article as talented and multi-faceted. He is certainly these — and more as will be seen. He is also reportedly multi-religious, though only the Catholic side of his faith shows. He is a committed and subtle promoter of the St. Thomas fable, which he repeats at length in his books *Madras Discovered* and *Madras Rediscovered*, and a zealous patron of the City's Portuguese churches.

We did not know any of these wonderful things when we sent him a copy of the first edition of this book for review. *Madras Musings* reviewed books then — early 1992 — and had the motto "We care for Madras" blazoned across its masthead, and we thought — rather naively we would soon learn — that knowing about Madras was also caring for it.

Sometime later, in the May 1-15 issue, a prominent, boxed, front page editorial appeared in the paper. It was obviously written by Muthiah himself though it appeared with the byline "Staff Reporter". It was called "Looking back — for action tomorrow" and read:

In all the excitement to draw up plans to make a heritage zone of Mylapore-San Thome, only one thing is certain. And that is that

the area, ancient Mylapore, which was pushed far from shore by the Portuguese after 1522 to create San Thome, and the new Mylapore, that developed where it is today through the efforts of the Vijayanagar "governors" of this part of Tondaimandalam, has the strongest historical reasons for conservation efforts to be spent on it.

Tamil tradition has Mylapore as over 2500 years old. Thiruvalluvar, it is said, lived and sang here. Christian tradition, as much an article of faith, has Thomas who Doubted, the Apostle of India, living and preaching in this part of the Coromandel from about 65 A.D. till his death in 72 A.D. Today, there is much associated with that legend that survives between the Mylapore beach and the Mount of St. Thomas.

Ptolemy the Greek geographer wrote of the great port of Maillarpha about 140 A.D. From the 6th to the 8th centuries, this was the chief port of the Pallavas of Kanchi and it was from here that the culture of India first spread to the lands of the east. It was to this great port that the Arabs and the Nestorians and Marco Polo came at different times, from the Pallava period to the 13th century. And it is Maila and Meilan and Mirapor they all also called Betumah, "The Town of Thomas".<sup>1</sup>

After the Pallavas, the prosperity of Mylapore declined and it was little more than a small town when the Portuguese established their settlement in its place and pushed it back from the shore.<sup>2</sup> But of it Camoens, the author of the national epic of the Portuguese, *The Lusiads* (1572) sang:

Here rose the potent city Meliapor  
Named, in olden time rich, vast  
and grand ...

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1. Only the Syrians identified Betumah with Mylapore. The Arabs said it was east of Cape Comorin, probably in Sumatra, and Gerini, in *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of East Asia*, says it is east of Singapore. There is also no agreement among scholars as to the meaning of the word *Betumah*. On this point as on others, S. Muthiah, like Nandita Krishna in *The Hindu*, is simply trying to pass off one version or another of the St. Thomas fable as history.

2. All evidence points to Mylapore being a flourishing and wealthy Hindu pilgrimage city until the Portuguese destroyed it. S. Muthiah is following the Portuguese accounts here, which were specifically written to cover up the great destruction of the city.

A lineage as ancient as that, a town associated with Thiruvalluvar and Thomas, the Pallavas and the Portuguese, certainly deserves its heritage protected. But to find common consent of what that heritage is and all of what it should encompass will be the first hurdle to be crossed in any plan to "save" Mylapore.

Unfortunately, try as he might, Muthiah does not have a facet among his multi-facets that reflects any real feeling for a Mylapore other than the one the *paranghi* priests and pirates colonized and sang about at home. We replied to this editorial in *Madras Musings* on May 5th:

The legend of St. Thomas coming to Mylapore may be an article of faith for some Christian communities in India. It is not an article of faith for Rome and the unedifying fable is no longer taught in Catholic universities in Europe and America. Nor was it an article of faith for Bishop Stephen Neill, himself a man of faith, when he, in his authoritative *History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to 1707 A.D.*, lamented the spread of this spurious history about St. Thomas among Indians.<sup>3</sup>

Equally important if not more so, the myth of St. Thomas is not an article of faith for the majority of citizens of Mylapore and Madras. It represents for them the destruction of the great Shiva temple on the Mylapore beach and the denigration of their religion by the Portuguese and the Roman Catholic Church. How can these citizens be expected to sympathize with the sordid heritage that San Thome represents? How can they be asked to assist with the preservation of the monuments that represent the success of this vicious attack on their faith?

This letter was not published of course, and in retrospect it is not reasonable to insist that it should have been. *Madras Musings* is a Catholic newspaper — for all of its non-sectarian face — and if *The Hindu* and *Indian Express* will not allow the truth about Mylapore to be told, we can hardly expect this fortnightly to be more honest.

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3. The question of whether or not the St. Thomas legend is really an article of faith for Christians is discussed on pages 108 and 109 of this book.



The references to St. Thomas in India which follow were found in various national and international media over the last four years — 1990 to 1994 — and are produced here for the record. They are in chronological order and do not include items already discussed in this book.

INDIAN EXPRESS, Madras, 23 April 1990, carries a P.T.I. news item about the annual pilgrimage to Kurisumudi, Kerala, where a shrine houses a golden cross believed to have been installed by St. Thomas in 52 A.D. Letters sent to the editor are not published.

INDIAN EXPRESS, New Delhi, 13 January 1991, in "The Lost Road to Ayodhya" by B.G. Verghese, claims that Christianity came to India in 56 A.D. with St. Thomas and is an indigenous religion that may pre-date Hinduism. Letters sent to the editor are not published.

THE WEEK, Cochin, 5 April 1992, in "Polishing the Past" by Vincent D'Souza, refers to the burial of St. Thomas in Mylapore. D'Souza quotes S. Muthiah and tries to mislead the public about the destruction of the Kapaleeswara Temple by the Portuguese. The article does "polish the past" and is a deceitful piece of negationist Christian propaganda — *The Week* is Catholic-owned and -edited. Letters sent to the editor are not published; instead, the magazine publishes a letter which says that "the article has placed the history of [Mylapore] in proper perspective".

INDIAN EXPRESS, New Delhi, 20 September 1992, in "Crisis in the Church" by P. Venugopal, refers to the arrival of St. Thomas in Kerala in 52 A.D. and promotes the theory that there was a native Indian Church up to the 5th century when it was taken over by Syrian immigrants. Letters sent to the editor are not published.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, Washington, November 1992, in



"Portugal's Sea Road to the East" by Merle Severy, refers to the martyrdom of St. Thomas in Mylapore. This article, like others before it, is a whitewash job on European and Christian imperialism. A letter sent to the editor is acknowledged but not published.

DANCING WITH SIVA: HINDUISM'S CONTEMPORARY CATECHISM, Concord, California, 1993, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, refers to the death of St. Thomas in Madras in 53 C.E. and identifies him as "founder of the Church of the Syrian Malabar Christians (Syrian Rite) in Goa". This self-styled Hindu source-book, written by the publisher of *Hinduism Today*, is poorly researched and unreliable as a reference work. A copy of the first edition of this book was sent to *Hinduism Today* in 1991 for review. Letters recently sent to Himalayan Academy, the book's publisher, and *Hinduism Today* for favour of publication.

B.B.C., London, 14 March 1993, in "Gods, Guides and Gurus" produced by David Craig, refers to St. Thomas in Kerala where he is said to have established the Syrian Church. As the B.B.C. is a "department" of the British Foreign Office and the "secular arm" of the Church of England, it is not prudent to send letters to the director.

ORGANISER, New Delhi, 24 October 1993, in "Masjid in a Mandir Shape" by Muzaffer Hussein, refers to the landing of St. Thomas at Cranganore. A letter sent to the editor is published in full on December 19th. It says in part, "That the *Organiser* should promote this political tale in even so innocuous a fashion as Hussain does, is ... a blow to truth and part of the history of minority appeasement that everybody without exception engages in ..."

DOORDARSHAN (National Network), New Delhi, 25 December 1993, in its Christmas programme, repeats the story that St. Thomas landed at Kodungallur (Cranganore) in the first years of the Christian era. Doordarshan neglects to point out that if Jesus was born on December 25th, St. Thomas, his twin, must have been born on the same day. No letter sent to the director.

READER'S DIGEST, Bombay, 1994, publishes new "inspirational" book on Christian history and the travels of the apostles called "After Jesus: The Triumph of Christianity". This magazine is a secular Christian missionary organ with an emphasis on Protestant ethics and like the *National Geographic* it has a long established

tradition of whitewashing Christian history. It will be "most edifying" to see how the *Reader's Digest* treats the travels of St. Thomas.

This list is random and incomplete. It does not represent any kind of statistic but it does show that the St. Thomas legend is pervasive throughout the media for a variety of reasons.



The letters that follow were exchanged between the historian Sita Ram Goel and the journalist Khushwant Singh. They are self-explanatory. Sita Ram Goel wrote to Khushwant Singh on 3 December 1992:

I am writing to you with reference to your article, "The Divided House of Kerala," in *The Sunday Observer* of December 1-7, 1991. Among other things, you say that "In A.D. 52 St. Thomas, one of the 12 apostles, arrived in northern Malabar and succeeded in converting some Namboodiri Brahmins and Nairs."

I draw your attention to a hot controversy which is presently raging in the South regarding the role of the St. Thomas myth. A clipping from the *Organiser* dated 7.11.91 is enclosed.<sup>4</sup> It shows what use the Christian theologians are making of the myth, and how Hindu scholars have started reacting to it.

Leading Christian historians have doubted whether a man like St. Thomas ever existed in history. Even those who accept his existence are positive that he never came to India. The whole subject has been discussed in detail in our publication, *The Myth of St. Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*, a copy of which I am forwarding to you by separate post.

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4. See " 'Dr.' Deivanayakam Gets His Due" by R.S. Narayanaswami reproduced in this book.

I hope you will spend some time to study the story. We should be able to stand on firm ground so far as facts are concerned unless we want to vindicate Bernard Shaw who said that journalists have a vested interest in ignorance.

Khushwant Singh replied to this letter on December 6th:

Thanks for your letter and the clipping which I have read. And the booklet which I will read. You pronounce as facts what suits your pre-thinking. What are the "facts" about the Ayodhya dispute all only known to historians who don't seem to agree on any of them.

Sita Ram Goel replied to this missive on December 9th:

Thanks for your postcard of the 6th.

The sentence, "You pronounce as facts what suits your pre-thinking," is not quite clear to me. Have we cited facts which are not facts? Or are there facts which we have not taken into account? In both cases, we wait for the other side to come out with evidence. So far we have waited in vain.

I have studied the sources and can say with full responsibility that St. Thomas visiting India is as much true as Jesus spending his early years in a Tibetan monastery. People in highest places have repeated the story without caring to check the sources. But repetition does not make truth out of a lie.

About Ayodhya, I must say that our side has been completely ignored by the media. I am sending another publication, *History versus Casuistry*, which shows how the VHP scholars presented solid evidence, and how the AIBMAC ran away from the conference convened by the Chandra Shekhar Government. Kindly find out for yourself if the AIBMAC has published the "evidence" they presented.

## SAINT THOMAS — A TTK PRODUCT

T.T. Krishnamachari was a Sunlight soap salesman who made a lot of money from the Raj, joined the Congress after independence, and somehow managed to become Nehru's finance minister. He is a success story in Madras and has a road named after him in Teynampet — T.T.K. Salai. His sons now preside over a business empire that includes pharmaceuticals, health care, travel, textiles, pressure cookers, condoms, road maps and Catholic propaganda. It is the Catholic propaganda that concerns us here but we cannot ignore the presence of the condoms. Catholics are not supposed to wear condoms — at least they are not supposed to be seen wearing them — and we cannot imagine what the Archbishop of Madras and St. Thomas — who was ideologically against intercourse in the first place — think of their new patron and his disparate business interests. But to start our story at the beginning.

In the first edition of this book we made a reference to the 1985 edition of the T.T.K. *A Map's Guide Book to Madras*. We had quoted a line from it regarding the fate of the original Kapaleeswara Temple which was a piece of wrong information that had been subsequently quoted by another writer in the *Indian Express*.<sup>1</sup> We had also noted that, "This popular guidebook, like others of its kind, treats the legend of St. Thomas in Madras as accepted historical fact."

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1. See page 158 for reference.

Now because we had made this observation and because we believed that the T.T.K. publisher was simply misinformed about the St. Thomas story — everybody was misinformed about it we had discovered — we had sent him a copy of our book on the St. Thomas myth when it was released in early 1991.

This was done as a courtesy — and it was sincerely meant as a courtesy — and we had no reason to suspect that the T.T.K. publisher had any interest in repeating the St. Thomas fable in his publications in an unqualified manner if he knew better. We were mistaken. Big business obviously had contingencies and a code of ethics that we could not anticipate or appreciate. And we did not know then that the talented and multi-faceted S. Muthiah, the man who would become editor of *Madras Musings* and editorial advisor to other Madras newspapers, was a director, consultant and copywriter at T.T. Maps and Publications Ltd., the T.T.K. company that published the Madras guidebooks.

Muthiah is an informed and articulate local historian and — as we have already noted — a motivated promoter of the St. Thomas tale, and we, unwittingly and in good faith, had given him yet another opportunity to publish abroad — or advise his principal to publish abroad — the great Portuguese lie. The 1993 edition of the T.T.K. *A Road Guide to Madras* is a masterpiece of disinformation. It has a large photograph of the San Thome Cathedral steeple and cross on its cover and a disingenuous commentary inside that presents the St. Thomas story straight across as Indian history, objectively and in detail. Obviously we had provoked this delinquent response from T.T. Maps and Publications Ltd. with our own St. Thomas book. The Kapaleeswara Temple entry, which had caught our attention in 1990, was now revised and gave the distinct impression that the temple had never been in any other place than it is today. This entry, like others, is a bundle of contradictions and appears to be a crude rewriting of S. Muthiah's own published Mylapore–San Thome histories.

Now as interesting as what is said in the T.T.K. guidebook, is what is *not* said. This trend of omission had started with Nandita Krishna's St. Thomas article in *The Hindu* and was copied later in the *Indian Express*. The new purveyors of the St. Thomas myth, all of them Hindus, are always careful to leave out the Brahmin assassin who stabbed the saint in the back while he was at prayer. This attempt to accommodate a vicious communal tale directed against themselves and their forefathers by cutting out the offending parts, is sad indeed and it has given the Catholic believer the last laugh. He knows that there is no martyred saint without an assassin — and *he* could only be a Hindu priest in 72 A.D.

We can only wonder at the ostrich-like posture of our intellectuals — heads in the sand and feathered bottoms stuck high in the air for everybody to see — and at their continued policy of self-abnegation and appeasement of an intolerant other side in order to keep the peace. We wonder indeed at their intellectual dishonesty. Big Church and big business are not going to change their unprincipled ways until Indian intellectuals themselves find the courage to tell the truth and continue to tell it even when first efforts appear to be counterproductive and overwhelmed by Catholic and commercial interests.

## NEWS ITEM

H.V.I.<sup>1</sup>

Madras, Sept. 22, 1991. Christian fanatics have sent a letter to Kanchi Kamakoti Shankaracharya Math, Kanchipuram, threatening to bomb the office of *Kamakoti*, a journal edited by T.S.V. Hari and published by T.V.S. Giri from Madras, if it does not stop a serial on the Hindu temples destroyed by Christians and converted into churches in the yesteryears. The journal has been publishing the serial based on authoritative historical sources and evidences produced by renowned research scholars.<sup>2</sup> Even *The Vedanta Kesari*, a monthly of Ramakrishna Math, published from Madras, had recently carried an article by no less a person than Swami Tapasyananda, Vice-President of the Math, pointing to evidences of the destruction of the ancient Kapaleeswara Temple which was converted into Santhome Church.<sup>3</sup> It is learnt that a copy of the threatening letter from fanatic Christians has been forwarded to the authorities for necessary action. The publisher of the journal, without commenting on the letter, told our correspondent that they do not intend to stop the serial succumbing to the threat.

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1. Hindu Voice International, News and Feature Service of Sister Nivedita Academy, Madras.

2. The series began in June 1991 with an article on the St. Thomas myth and the destruction of the Kapaleeswara Temple by the Portuguese. It continued for three months with articles on St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier and the destruction of temples in Madras, Chingleput and Arcot districts by Muslims. The source materials for the articles were Voice of India publications.

3. See "The Legend of a Slain Saint to Stain Hinduism" reproduced in this book.





## APPENDIXES



## TEMPLE LOOTING IN KERALA — THEN AND NOW

LEELA TAMPI

The Hindu people of India, even if belatedly, are now awakening to the humiliation, tragedy and tremendous loss inflicted on them through the savage destruction of their ageless, holy temples by invading hordes in the name of their religion of the Arabian desert.

In spite of this heartening fact that the nation has now woken up and is carefully taking stock of the unspeakable atrocities and national loss it had suffered at the hands of the butchering, bestial invaders, sadly enough the devastation suffered by the temples of Kerala has not attracted the nation's attention. On the one hand the impression that the Kerala temples had escaped destruction has gained ground: probably because unlike in the other parts of India, in Kerala mosques are not seen squatting on top of temple foundations; nor is the Kerala landscape pock-marked with heartbreaking rotting mounds that were once the holy temples of the Hindus.

But it certainly is not that Kerala was more fortunate than the rest of India in the matter of the destruction of temples. The stark truth is that the devastation suffered by Kerala temples at the hands of foreigners and local quislings is as direful as that suffered by temples elsewhere in India. The only difference is that as most of the damage was perpetrated by the cunning British, it was accomplished insidiously, like murder being committed by slow suffocation without any wound being seen on the outside.

While the rabidly fanatic Tipu Sultan — the bandit of Mysore — destroyed two thousand temples in the Malabar region to establish Islam, it was the British rulers acting at the behest of Christian missionaries who, starting from two hundred years ago, dug the grave of the Kerala temples. The wily British accomplished this not by resorting to anything so crude and beastly as demolishing them: but by simply confiscating all of them — in the name of the state of course — along with all their landed properties and then making sure that the temples rotted away from calculated, steady attrition.

The present United Democratic Government of Kerala,<sup>1</sup> under the command of the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress (a front party for the Churches) is now living up to the tradition of all former Kerala governments by following this same policy with enthusiasm and vigour.

Not only the British overlords but also the governments that came into power in Kerala after 1947 were never content with this wholesale robbery alone of temple properties. They continuously plundered, and helped others plunder, the relatively better off temples of even parts of the grounds the temples stood on; and also of the offerings of devotees. The latest of these forays is the still standing order (now under review by the High Court) of K. Karunakaran, the Chief Minister of Kerala, that the Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple Dewaswom (the management appointed by the Government) withdraw ten crores from the banks and deposit the amount with the state treasury to help the Government out of its present financial crisis.

This grave and sinister development has for once jolted the lethargic Hindus of Kerala out of their perennial slumber and into awareness of the pitiful plight their temples have been reduced to as a direct result of the suzerainty the Kerala Government had usurped over them. When Hindu organisations and

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1. This article was written in 1991.

long-suffering devotees vehemently protested, the chief minister issued an unctuous rationale to the effect that the ten crores would be as safe with the Government as with the banks, and that interest would be paid. He also added duplicitously that “there will be no compulsion to obtain funds from the houses of worship of any religion”. He was feigning that the places of worship of all religions had always been treated equally by the state, when the truth is that it was the temples — and temples alone — that had been subjected to ruthless plunder by the Government; so much so that they now have practically no assets left except the offerings of devotees. And this too had been steadily looted by the politicians running the Government.

This operation to annihilate the temples of Kerala was first organised and put into effect two hundred years ago by Colonel Munro, the British Resident in the erstwhile State of Travancore (the former princely States of Travancore and Cochin, along with Malabar, formerly a district of the Madras Presidency, together form the Kerala State). The British in 1810 made the then ruler of Travancore, Rani Lakshmi Bai, appoint the British Resident, Col. Munro, as Dewan of the state also. With supreme audacity Munro would convert his “advice” to the Rani as Dewan into commands by virtue of his position as Resident. Munro who was a committed Christian missionary as well as a ruthless colonialist, naturally considered it his pious duty to debilitate the Hindu religion and at the same time foster Christianity. He also realised that this would help cement Christian colonialism in the region. He achieved both these aims at one shot by the simple expedient of taking over by fiat (euphemistically called “proclamation”) nearly all the temples of Travancore and Cochin and also by seizing all their landed properties without any compensation whatsoever. When he was thus busily confiscating temple lands without compensation, Munro parallelly issued hundreds of munificent land grants to the Christian Churches.

The cultivated and cultivable temple lands thus expropriated were so vast and the income from them so enormous that within the year the annual land revenue accruing to the state doubled. Of course as part of his well-laid plan to extirpate the Hindu religion and temples, Munro kept all the income from the expropriated temple lands with the state and did not remit any amount at all to the temples. Very soon the temples, thus impoverished and effectively devitalized, fell into wrack and ruin.

The disorganised, apathetic Hindus were very slow to awaken to the catastrophe inflicted on them by Munro. Apart from the usual spiritlessness of the Hindus, this submission was also due to the fact that at that time the Christian and Muslim population was very small and Hindus for this reason deluded themselves into believing that the confiscated lands, even if with the Government, still belonged to them.

Soon vast demographic changes took place. The Muslim population through forcible conversions by Tipu Sultan and the Christian population through British-sponsored fierce proselytism, increased by leaps and bounds. These now powerful minorities lost no time in making it clear to the faction-ridden, enervated Hindus that the temple lands, now that they had been vested with the state, belonged to them as much as to the Hindus.

When at long last the Hindus awoke to the awful disaster that had been wreaked upon them and made bold to demand the return of the seized lands to the temples, they found to their dismay that Munro had been too clever for them. The Resident-Dewan-missionary had seen to it that the records of the sequestered temple lands and of state-owned lands were thoroughly intermixed; so much so that it had been made quite impossible to catalogue temple lands separately from government lands.

This convenient excuse — that it was no longer possible to distinguish temple lands from state lands — which made shameless use of outright brigandage, was to be used in the future

times without number by the Government and double-crossing politicians not only to hang on to the temple properties but also to foil the feeble attempts made by Hindus from time to time to claim compensation for the seized lands.

To remit even part of the huge income from the confiscated lands to the temples for their upkeep was not even thought of. It was a full hundred years later that a commission was appointed to look into the matter. This commission determined the income from the temple lands at the absurdly low rate of land revenue levied on them; and recommended not that at least this puny amount be paid to the temples, but only that the interest due on it — and that too only at three percent — be paid. Even this the Government did not do for a decade. This commission's recommendation that the temples which were falling into ruins be repaired by the Government (as it had taken over their property) was studiously ignored.

After years of agitation, in 1922, the interest on the income — payment of compensation or of the actual income was never again to be considered at all — due to the temples was fixed at a paltry twenty-two lakhs. In 1948, again after prolonged agitation the amount was increased to fifty-one lakhs, but without any provision for compensation for inflation. This amount of fifty-one lakhs today is worth less than one lakh at 1948 value of the rupee. And yet the Kerala Government has arrogantly ignored the urgent pleas of Hindu organisations for upward revision of the amount to compensate for the dismal fall in the value of the rupee.

Because of the wholesale confiscation of the properties bestowed on the temples for rituals and upkeep, thousands of temples in Kerala do not have the wherewithal even for token rituals; thousands more have fallen into ruins. Thus the shrewd and crafty missionary-cum-Resident-cum-Dewam accomplished through his single bloodless coup the ruin and devastation of

Hindu temples — and Hindu pride — which the Muslim raiders through the centuries and local-born despicable tyrants like Aurangzeb could only do after numberless battles, massacres, rape and arson.

This war of attrition waged on the temples of Kerala for a century and a half actually picked up momentum after independence. The double-dealing politicians, wearing the mask of secularism, were only too glad to betray the Hindu community by heaping further blows on the temples. For they knew that this would secure their positions with the "minorities", who with their monolithic, anti-secular and powerful organisations were holding the reigns of power in the state. Very soon after independence the Congress Government enacted the Land Reforms Act which was so crafted that it effectively denuded the temples — but not the churches and mosques — of what little bits of land that still remained with them. The Central Government also did its secular act of destroying temples by confiscating by special legislation — again with absolutely no compensation — the vast forest lands of the Malabar temples which were promptly taken over by Christian and Muslim encroachers. It is well-known that the greatest beneficiaries of the Land Reforms Act in the whole of Kerala were Christians and Muslims, and the greatest losers the Hindu temples and Hindus.

While this sequestration and annexation of temple lands had been going on for the last two hundred years, no Government of Kerala past or present, had ever dared to take over one single church or mosque or just one cent of their vast land holdings. Not only this; some years ago the Kerala Government with much fanfare sanctioned as annual grant — that is to say, a yearly free gift for all time to come — of fifteen lakhs for pension for the *mukris* of mosques. This when priests of the temples, properties of which had been stolen by the state, had no such pension and were miserably paid besides. Moreover, to get Muslim goodwill



all the immense *wakf* properties in Kerala (and in the whole of the rest of India, as this is a Central Government Act) have been exempted from the Buildings and Rent Control Act, which is now strangling the remaining few buildings of temples and ashrams in Kerala, not to speak of the rest of India.

At present forty-five percent of the population of Kerala is Christian and Muslim and a section of Hindus, being communists, are atheists. Hence the Government is not only mostly non-Hindu, but anti-Hindu. In these circumstances, and also being fervidly "secular", the only right course for the Government to follow is to dissociate itself completely from the temples and vest their administration with true devotees. But with unbelievable brazenness and hypocrisy the Kerala Government is not only clinging to ownership rights over the temples but is also claiming rights the maharajas of old, who were real protectors of temples, never even dreamed of. Today it is heart-breaking to see the holy, ancient temples of Kerala debased to the status of a lowly, inconsequential department of a Government that is in effect run by Christian and Muslim religious leadership. This is not all; the temples are also under the mercy of greedy quislings all too ready to further bleed them to satisfy their masters.

While the number of grand churches and mosques in Kerala has increased more than a hundred times in the last five decades, not a single temple of significance has been built during this time. Worse still, during this period hundreds of temples have fallen down and disappeared into the dust.

When India was at war with China, the Guruvayur Dewaswom was "persuaded" to transfer to the Central Government a huge quantity of gold. As far as is known this gold was never returned to the temple. The Guruvayur Dewaswom was also "persuaded" by the Kerala Government to invest one crore of rupees in the Indira Vikas Patrika. Huge amounts were plundered for political shows like the Congress Party souvenir. A nondescript

motion picture was also made on Guruvayur temple which made the temple poorer by twenty lakhs. It has become a practice to disburse money under false headings to politicians, their relatives and friends. More crores would have been looted from the temple by politicians but for the timely intervention of courageous devotees who blew the whistle in time.

Not even during times of national emergency like the time of war when Hindu women donated their gold *māṅgalya sūtras*, did the Kerala Government dare to make any effort to obtain deposits from the opulent churches and mosques — nor did the bishops or the *moulvis* offer any deposit or donation. To put it in a nutshell, where the Hindus are concerned, for the Kerala Government it is loot, loot, loot; and where the churches and mosques are concerned, it is give, give, give.

While the Kerala Government thus considers the accumulated offerings of devotees at the great temples as their own to pocket and squander as they please, they consider it an anathema to provide even the minimum facilities for pilgrims at the great temples of holy pilgrimage. Repeated frantic requests for a few acres of forest land for the provision of some basic amenities for the millions of pilgrims converging on the forest temple at the Sabarimala Sri Sasta Temple have been flatly turned down on the ground that forest land cannot be alienated without the permission of the Centre. At the same time ten hectares of forest land were granted in a jiffy to build a church — proclaimed by the bishops as a rival pilgrim centre — close to the Sabarimala temple. And the successive Governments of Kerala in the last fifteen years have been falling over each other to provide free titles to the well-organised, Church-backed encroachers — all of them Christians of course — to huge areas of forest land, running into more than a million acres.

Thus it is not only that every government in Kerala had been ruthlessly sabotaging and destroying temples for the last two

centuries with no let up till today; these governments have also during this time deliberately and eagerly functioned as the transshipment point for the transferring of Hindu wealth to non-Hindus.

It is against this shockingly larcenous background that the latest demand of the Kerala Government for ten crores from the Guruvayur temple should be viewed by the Hindus of India.

While much noise is being made about the availability of ten crores with the Guruvayur Dewaswom (offerings of mostly poor devotees for temple purposes only), the case of thousands of temples in Kerala without the wherewithal for rituals or repairs is carefully concealed. And this ten crores with the Guruvayur Dewaswom is but a microscopic sum when compared to the vast funds — running into thousands of crores — available with the lavishly foreign-funded churches and mosques. And of course they have kept their colossal landed properties also. It is well-known that the Churches in Kerala are the biggest landowner after the state. In just one instance, a missionary outfit in Malabar owns such a huge area of land in a single holding that they renamed the place "Bibleland". And what is more the Postal Department of secular India has also named their office in the area Bibleland Post Office. The Churches own countless plantations which have been carefully left outside the purview of the Land Reforms Act.

In addition the Churches in Kerala own vast extents of urban land in the best part of every city and town. (This is of course the case in the rest of India also.) In Tiruvananthapuram the palace of just one bishop — among several bishops and their palaces — stands on nearly thirty acres of land abutting on the Raj Bhavan compound. This bishop, not one to hide his might and power, has also built a high-profile church practically touching the Raj Bhavan entrance. And this bishop, and the other bishops and convents own hundreds of acres in the city. The

Churches have been for quite some time investing in a big way in multi-storeyed shopping and office complexes. They also have huge holdings in other real estate, publishing houses, banks and companies.

But of course in Kerala the limitless flow of treasure into the Churches is from the education sector. They have established from British times a near monopoly in education, from primary schools to first grade colleges. More than fifty percent of the hundreds of crores the Kerala Government spends on education is commandeered by the bishops and mother superiors.

In spite of this golden flow from the state into the Church coffers, and in spite of all their colossal wealth and foreign funds, the Government will never dare to request them for funds, no matter how critical the financial crunch. At the same time the Government considers the small bits of the remaining assets and funds of the temples to be their ordained targets for regular booty taking — much of it to be used to further destroy the temples.

For the Hindus of Kerala to retrieve even part of their lost honour and dignity, firstly the present niggardly payment of fifty-one lakhs (such is the perfidy and hatred of the anti-Hindu politicians towards the temples that they regularly refer to this sum as a “grant”), should be raised sufficiently to tally with the income from the seized temple lands at present rates. A small beginning can be made by increasing the present insulting, measly payment of fifty-one lakhs to compensate for the steep fall in the value of the rupee since 1948; and this newly determined amount should be revised every year henceforward. After all the Kerala Government is doing exactly this in every area — except, of course, in the case of the temples.

Secondly, the Hindus have to get the confiscated temples released from the stranglehold of the politicians (themselves the willing hostages of the Muslim League, Kerala Congress and atheists) who happen to be born as Hindus but are avowedly

anti-Hindu by conviction. Interestingly these politicians who declare they are not Hindus see nothing dishonourable and dishonest in voting on temple matters as Hindus — with the open aim of snatching the maximum spoils for themselves and their cohorts.

When the Kerala chief minister equates the depositing of Guruvayur temple funds with the treasury with bank deposits the crucial fact that there is no withdrawal facility in the treasury is kept under wraps. And if by some horrible chance the ten crores are placed in the treasury, we can expect a replay of the Munro scenario — the Government seizing the capital for ever, and later with pious protestations of fair intentions, offering to pay the interest on the interest on the ten crores — if and when it chooses.

We hear a great deal day in and day out about the wonderful religious harmony that prevails in Kerala as exemplified by a church, a mosque and a temple standing close together in Palayam, in the heart of Tiruvananthapuram. One close look at these places of worship will prove that what they actually demonstrate is something quite different: the impoverishment, abasement and servitude of the Hindus. The church in Palayam is a magnificent edifice on a vast tract of priceless land; the mosque too is an imposing new building on spacious grounds. But the temple — it is just a dilapidated hutment standing on just four cents of land.

This in general is the pathetic, degraded condition of the Hindu temples, brought on by the ceaseless plundering first by the British colonialists intent on spreading Christianity, by the studied negligence of the state governments, wholesale destruction by Tipu Sultan, and in post-independence days, by the looting by governments owned and operated by powerful Christian and Muslim vested interests; not to mention the greedy quislings out to fatten themselves at the expense of the temples.

How did it happen that the Hindus of Kerala stood silently by when their hallowed, highly venerated temples were thus plundered, dishonoured and reduced to beggary? The fact is, in the course of centuries of slavery we Hindus have assiduously taught ourselves to mistake apathy for tolerance, servility for gentleness and cowardice for pacifism. The process is still continuing, with the Hindus tricked into accepting self-hate and self-destruction as secularism.

Thorough rethinking and strong corrective measures based on the truly Hindu principles of truth and fearlessness on the part of the downtrodden Hindus of Kerala has become imperative if the Hindu temples, religion and culture are to survive at all. Fearless and concerted action is also needed for regaining the lost honour and dignity of the Hindus.

## TOWARDS A REAL HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

KOENRAAD ELST

In the West we don't hear much about it, and even in India it doesn't make many headlines, but Hindu society is faced with a Christian problem besides the better-known Muslim problem. One focus of this conflict is the history of Christian iconoclasm, which is not entirely finished, and which past history has crystallized into some hundreds of churches standing on the ruins of purposely demolished Hindu temples. This history of iconoclasm is not an accident: it is the logical outcome of Christian theology, particularly of its deep hostility towards non-Christian forms of worship.

### Christian sacred places in Palestine

A book well worth reading for those engaged in controversies over sacred sites, in particular concerning Christian churches in South India, is *Christians and the Holy Places* by Joan Taylor, a historian from New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> It shows that the places where Christians commemorate the birth and death of Jesus have nothing to do with Jesus, historically.

The Nativity Church in Bethlehem was built in the fourth century A.D. in forcible replacement of a Pagan place of worship, dedicated to the God Tammuz-Adonis. Until then, it had had no special significance for Christians, who considered pilgrimages to sacred places a Pagan practice anyway: you cannot concentrate in one place (hence, go on pilgrimage to) the Omnipresent. The concept of "sacred place" was introduced into

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Taylor: *Christians and the Holy Places*, Oxford University Press 1993.

Christianity by converts, especially at the time of Emperor Constantine's switch to a pro-Christian state policy.

The Christian claim to Bethlehem as Jesus's birthplace was a fraud from the beginning, as Cambridge historian Michael Arnheim has shown: through numerous contradictions and factual inaccuracies, the Gospel writers betray their intention to locate Jesus's birth in Bethlehem at any cost, against all information available to them.<sup>2</sup> The reason is that they had to make Jesus live up to an Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah was to be born there.

The Holy Cross Church in Jerusalem was built in forcible replacement of a temple of the fertility Goddess Venus, at the personal initiative of Emperor Constantine. His mother had seen in a dream that Jesus had died at that particular place, though close scrutiny of the original Christian texts shows that they point to a place 200 metres to the south. Constantine had the Venus temple demolished and the ground searched, and yes, his experts duly found the cross on which Jesus had died. They somehow assumed that their forebears of 33 A.D. had a habit of leaving or even burying crucifixion crosses at the places where they had been used, *quod non*. The Christian claim to the site of the Holy Cross is based on the *dream* of a gullible but fanatical woman, and fortified with a faked excavation.<sup>3</sup>

Remember the Ayodhya debate, where Hindu scholars were challenged to produce ever more solid proof of the traditions underlying the sacredness of the controversial site? Whatever proof they came up with was automatically, without any inspection, dismissed by the high priests of secularism as "myth" and "faked evidence". It was alleged that there was a "lack of proof"

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Arnheim: *Is Christianity True?*, Duckworth & Co., London 1984.

<sup>3</sup> The church is known today as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was built to enclose the alleged sites of the cross and the tomb which were believed to be close to each other. Its first building was dedicated ca. 336 A.D.



for the assumption that Rama ever lived there. But in the case of the Christian sacred places, we do not just have *lack of proof* that the religion's claim is *true*, but we have *positive proof* that its claim is *untrue*, and that it was historically part of a campaign of fraud and destruction.

The stories of the Nativity and Holy Cross sites were trendsetters in a huge campaign of christianization of Pagan sacred sites. Joan Taylor also mentions how the Aphrodite temple in Ein Karim near Jerusalem was demolished and replaced with the Nativity Church of John the Baptist. In the same period, all over the Roman Empire, Pagan places of worship were demolished, sacred groves chopped down and idols smashed by Christian preachers who replaced them with Christian relics which they themselves posted or "discovered" there, like the twenty-odd "only real" instances of Jesus's venerable foreskin.

Pagan symbols and characters were superficially christianized. For example, Saint George and the archangel Michael, both depicted as slaying a dragon, are nothing but Christian names for the Indo-European myth of the dragon-slayer (in the Vedic version: Indra slaying Vṛtra). The Pagan festivals of the winter solstice (*Yuletide*) and the spring equinox were deformed into the Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter.<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian icon of the Mother Goddess Isis with her son Horus in her lap, very popular throughout the Roman Empire, was turned into the Madonna with the Babe Jesus. At the same time, devotees of the genuine Mother Goddess and enthusiasts of the genuine

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<sup>4</sup>In their own version of the winter solstice, the Romans celebrated December 25th as the birthday of Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness, at the close of their most popular festival, the week-long Saturnalia. January 1st was then celebrated as the beginning of the New Year. The contention of Protestant fundamentalists that Christmas, the New Year and Easter are Pagan festivals is correct. The names of the days of the week and months of the year in the Western "Christian" calendar are also of Pagan origin, as is the choice of Sunday as the designated holy day.— I.S.

winter solstice festival were persecuted, their temples demolished or turned into churches.

This massive campaign of fraud and destruction was subsequently extended to the Germanic, Slavic and Baltic countries. Numerous ancient churches across Europe are so many Babri Masjids, containing or standing on the left-overs of so many Rama Janmabhoomi temples. Just after the christianization of Europe was completed with the forced conversion of Lithuania in the fifteenth century, the iconoclastic zeal was taken to America, and finally to Africa and Asia.

### **Christian impositions on India**

India too has had its share of Christian iconoclasm. After the Portuguese settlement, hundreds of temples in and around the Portuguese-held territories were demolished, often to be replaced with Catholic churches. "Saint" Francis Xavier described with glee the joy he felt when he saw the Hindu idols smashed and temples demolished.<sup>5</sup> Most sixteenth and seventeenth century churches in India contain the rubble of demolished Hindu temples. The French-held pockets witnessed some instances of Catholic fanaticism as well. Under British rule, Hindu places of worship in the population centres were generally left alone (some exceptions notwithstanding), but the tribal areas became the

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<sup>5</sup> The *Indian Express*, true to its current negationist editorial policy, continues to publish sentimentalized and misleading articles about this missionary and his Lutheran counterpart Bartholomeus Ziegenbalg, and about Portuguese churches built on temple sites, in its Monday features page "Tamil Nadu Notes". These missionaries and others are presented as lovers of and contributors to Tamil learning and culture, when in fact they came to India with the sole intention of destroying both. Prof. Maria Lazar, the author of the Ziegenbalg piece, has also done an article on Hindu craftsmen who manufacture images of Christian saints, and sententiously comments that this is a much needed example of religious tolerance today. Hindu craftsmen doing this kind of work are not unusual in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and real religious tolerance will be seen in South India when Christian craftsmen start making images of Hindu deities with the same dedication and respect.— I.S.

scene of culture murder by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. There are recent instances of desecration of tribal village shrines and sacred groves by Christians, assaults on Hindu processions both in the tribal belts and in the south, and attempts to turn the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari into a Virgin Mary shrine.<sup>6</sup>

In South India, the myth of St. Thomas provided the background for a few instances of temple destruction at places falsely associated with his life and alleged martyrdom, especially the St. Thomas Church replacing the Mylapore Shiva Temple in Madras. In this case, the campaign of fraud is still continuing: till today, Christian writers continue to claim historical validity for the long-refuted story of the apostle Thomas coming to India and getting killed by jealous Brahmins.<sup>7</sup> The story is parallel to that of Jesus getting killed by the Jews, and it has indeed served as an argument in an elaborate Christian doctrine of anti-Brahminism which resembles Christian anti-Semitism to the detail. At any rate, it is a fraud.

From those Christian polemistis insisting on the St. Thomas narrative's historicity (I will be the first to welcome the unexpected demonstration of the historicity of traditions dismissed as "myths"), we may at least expect that they tell their prospective converts the whole of the story. They should not omit that it describes Thomas as Jesus's twin brother (implying that Jesus was

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<sup>6</sup> The phenomenon of Christian violence against Hindus in South India, generally ignored by Western India-watchers, is briefly mentioned by Susan Bayly in her (otherwise anti-Hindu) article: "History and the Fundamentalists: India after the Ayodhya Crisis", in *Bulletin of the Academy of Arts and Sciences*, April 1993. The problem has hardly been documented by Hindu organizations, with their usual slothfulness in gathering and providing information. One of the few exceptions is Thanulunga Nadar: *Unrest at Kanyakumari*, Hindu Munnani, Kanyakumari 1982.

<sup>7</sup> In Roman days and long afterwards, "India" was practically synonymous with "Asia", from Ethiopia to Japan. Columbus expected to reach *Zipangu* (Chinese *Ribenguo*, "land of the sun's origin", i.e. Japan), and when he thought he got there, he called the inhabitants "Indians".

not God's Only Begotten Son) and as an anti-social character who exhausted his royal protector's patience by luring many women away from their families; and that it relates how Jesus was a slave-trader who was not even above selling his own brother.

### **Towards 1998**

For a proper way of digesting this dark episode of Christian iconoclasm, we suggest the following two steps. First of all, a full stop has to be put to the surreptitious forms of Christian iconoclasm which are continuing to this very day. It is nonsense to talk of dialogue and communal harmony as long as attempts are still being made to disrupt existing modes of worship.

Secondly, Hindus and Christians should take inspiration from the contemporary American attitude towards the horrible story of America's christianization through culture murder and genocide. After all, the Christian conquests in India and in America are two sides of the same coin. In the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, the Pope awarded one half of the world (ultimately comprising areas from Brazil to Macao, including Africa and India) to Portugal, and the other half (including most of America and the Philippines) to Spain, on condition that they use their power to christianize the population. The Spanish campaign in America had juridically and theologically exactly the same status as its Portuguese counterpart in India. If the result was not as absolutely devastating in India as it was in America, this was merely due to different power equations: the Portuguese were less numerous than the Spanish, and the Indians were technologically and militarily more equal to the Europeans than the Native Americans were. The Church's intentions behind Columbus's discovery of America and Vasco da Gama's landing in India were exactly the same.

On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first meeting with the Pagans of the New World (1992), many Christian dignitaries have expressed their shame and regret at what

has been done to the Native Americans by (or, as they prefer to put it, "in the name of") Christianity. Even the Pope has publicly acknowledged at least a part of his Church's guilt.<sup>8</sup> Now that the 500th anniversary of Vasco da Gama's landing in India is approaching (1998), Hindus should make sure that the Christians including the Pope do not forget to do some similar soul-searching and to offer similar apologies.

Like the Native Americans, Hindu society will not be satisfied with a few cheap words. As Hindu spokesman Arun Shourie writes: "By an accounting [of the calumnies heaped upon India and Hinduism] I do not of course mean some declaration saying, 'Sorry'. By an accounting I mean that the calumnies would be listed; the grounds on which they were based would be listed, and the Church would declare whether, in the light of what is known now, the grounds were justified or not; and the motives which impelled those calumnies would be exhumed."<sup>9</sup> This is actually an application of the rules of confession, one of the Catholic sacraments: it is not enough to ask for absolution from your sins, you first have to confess what sins you have actually committed.

The Church now claims that it is no longer the aggressive Church Militant of the old days, that its whole outlook has profoundly changed. Shourie lists five criteria by which we will know whether these changes are genuine: 1) an honest accounting of the calumnies which the Church has heaped on India and Hinduism; 2) informing Indian Christians and non-Christians about the findings of Bible scholarship; 3) informing them about the

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<sup>8</sup> Pope John-Paul II has even announced a comprehensive statement of the Church's guilt by the year 2000. This provoked a lot of protest from other Church dignitaries.

<sup>9</sup> Arun Shourie: *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (ASA Publ., New Delhi 1994), p.229. The book is an expanded version of his lectures before a conference called by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Its publication provoked a new round of debate (rather less friendly, this time) of which the proceedings are being published by Voice of India: *Arun Shourie and His Christian Critic*.

impact of scientific progress on Church doctrine; 4) acceptance that reality is multi-layered and that there are many ways of perceiving it; 5) bringing the zeal for conversion in line with the recent declarations that salvation is possible through other religions as well.<sup>10</sup> I expect Church leaders to reply: "You cannot ask of the Indian Church to commit suicide like that!" But let us give them a chance.

### **Christian hostilities today**

After the Church's public self-criticism before the Native Americans, there is every reason to make 1998 the year to take stock of what Christianity has done to India. But in this case, the Christians may need some insistent reminding: unlike in America, where they have had to face the facts of history, and where they have had to switch to a pro-Native stand under the aegis of Liberation Theology, the Christian Churches in India are still continuing on a course of self-righteous aggression against the native society and culture.

Seldom have I seen such viper-like mischievousness as in the most recent strategies of the Christian mission in India. It is a viper with two teeth. On the one side, there is the gentle penetration through social and educational services, now compounded with a rhetoric of "inculturation": glib talk of "dialogue", "sharing", "common ground", fraudulent donning of Hindu robes by Christian monks, all calculated to fool Hindus about the continuity of the Christian striving to destroy Hinduism and replace it with the cult of Jesus. This is not to deny that there are some Indian Christians who sincerely believe that the denomination game is outdated, that we should go "beyond the religions" and mix freely with non-Christians without trying to change their religious loyalties; but they do not represent official Church policy.

On the other side, there is a vicious attempt to delegitimize Hinduism as India's native religion, and to mobilize the weaker

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

sections of Hindu society against it with "blood and soil" slogans. Seeing how the nativist movement in the Americas is partly directed against Christianity because of its historical aggression against native society (in spite of Liberation Theology's attempts to recuperate the movement), the Indian Church tries to take over this nativist tendency and forge it into a weapon against Hinduism. Christian involvement in the so-called Dalit ("oppressed") and Adivasi ("aboriginal") movements is an attempt to channel the nativist revival and perversely direct it against native society itself. It advertises its services as the guardian of the interests of the "true natives" (meaning the Scheduled Castes and Tribes) against native society, while labelling the upper castes as "Aryan invaders", on the basis of an outdated theory postulating an immigration in 1500 B.C.

To declare people "invaders" because of a supposed immigration of some of their ancestors 3500 years ago is an unusual feat of political hate rhetoric in itself, but the point is that it follows a pattern of earlier rounds of Christian aggression. It is Cortés all over again: Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, could defeat the Aztecs, the ruling nation which had immigrated from Utah three centuries earlier, by enlisting the support of nations subdued by the Aztecs, with himself posing as their liberator (of course, they were to regret their "liberation"). The attempt to divide the people of a country on an ethnic basis — whether it is a real ethnic distinction as in the case of Cortés' Mexico, or a wilfully invented one as in the case of India — is an obvious act of hostility, unmistakably an element of warfare.

While in the post-colonial decades, Church rhetoric has markedly softened, its action on the ground has only become more aggressive. Shourie quotes intelligence reports on the role of missionaries in armed separatist movements in the North-East, and on their violations of the legal restrictions in Arunachal

Pradesh on conversion by force or allurements.<sup>11</sup> The World Council of Churches officially supports separatism in the tribal areas (and even among the Scheduled Castes, another "indigenous nation"!), in pursuit of the long cherished project of carving out Christian-dominated independent states. In its 1989 Darwin Declaration, the W.C.C. announces: "Indigenous peoples strive for and demand the full spectrum of autonomy available in the principle of self-determination, including the right to re-establish our own nation-states... The Churches and governments have an obligation to see [this] come to reality by providing the necessary means, without any restriction attached."<sup>12</sup> What sounds fair enough in the case of the Tibetans or the East-Timorese, is used in India as a step on the way to unrestricted exercise of clerical power, a formalization of the already existing trends in the Christian-dominated states of the Indian republic.

Therefore, "without any restriction", Christians are teaching some sections of Hindu society hatred against other sections. You don't normally try to create hostility between your friends, so the Church's policy to pit sections of Hindu society against one another should be seen for what it is: an act of aggression, which warrants an active policy of self-defence and counter-attack. This counter-attack should take a proper form, adapted to the genius of Hinduism.

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<sup>11</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.234-235. A study yet to be written might usefully add some research into the complicity of Indian politicians. Thus, I know a Jesuit missionary working in Chhotanagpur, expelled from India by the Rajiv Gandhi administration because of political agitation. Back in Belgium, already preparing to move to another country, he received news that the new (Janata Dal) government would extend help to whomever the Hindus disliked; he applied for a visa and is now back among his flock practising Liberation Theology. I won't doubt the man's honesty ("I was only agitating against the redeployment of tigers in the jungle by urban ecologists who value wildlife more than tribal people!"), but the point is that *any* Christian agitation and intrigue will be supported by other factions of India's colourful anti-Hindu coalition.

<sup>12</sup> Published in *Link*, the bimonthly newsletter of the W.C.C.'s "Programme to Combat Racism", 1989/4.



## **Why Christianity should be rejected**

The Hindu response to Christian aggression should concentrate on consciousness-raising. Information should be widely disseminated on the two fundamental reasons why Christianity is totally unacceptable as an alternative to Hinduism.

The first is its historical record, with its destructive fanaticism as well as its opportunistic collaboration with whichever social force seemed most helpful to the Church's expansion. Contrary to current propaganda, Christianity has historically supported feudalism, absolute kingship, slavery and apartheid, all properly justified with passages from the Bible. St. Peter and St. Paul gave a clear message to the oppressed of the world: "Slaves, accept with due submission the authority of your masters, not only if they are good and friendly, but even if they are harsh." (1 *Peter* 2:18) And: "Slaves, be obedient to your earthly masters with devotion and simplicity, as if your obedience were directed to Christ Himself." (*Ephesians* 6:5)<sup>13</sup> Liberation Theology, far from constituting a break with the Church's long-standing collaboration with the dominant powers, is merely the application of the same strategy to new circumstances: now that the masses constitute a decisive political force, now that social activism is a theme which ensures political and financial support from different quarters, the Church has decided to tap into this new source of power as well.

The other (and in my opinion the most important) fact about Christianity which ought to be the topic of an all-out education campaign, is the scientific certainty that its fundamental teachings are historically fraudulent, intellectually garbled, and psychologically morbid. Jesus was neither the son of a virgin

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to deny the merits of some Christians at some stages in the struggle against slavery, e.g. the Jesuits in Brazil and Paraguay in the 17th and 18th century, and the Quakers in the USA in the 19th century. But remark that the Jesuit efforts were stopped by the Church itself, and that in the 18th century, the Quakers had been quite well-represented among slave-owners themselves. Christianity as a doctrine cannot claim the honour of freeing the oppressed.

mother nor the Only Begotten Son of God. Jesus's perception of himself as the Messiah and the Son of God was a psychopathological condition, supported by hallucinations (especially the voice he heard during his baptism, the visions of the devil during his fast, the vision of Elijah and Moses on Mount Tabor), and partly caused by his most ordinary but traumatic shame of having been conceived out of wedlock. Numerous manipulations (interpolation, omission, antedating, deliberate mistakes of translation and interpretation) of the textual basis of Christian doctrine by the evangelists and other Church Fathers have been discovered, analyzed and explained in their historical context by competent Bible scholars, most of them working at Christian institutes.<sup>14</sup>

Now some Hindus will object that there must also be a bright side. I am well aware that Christian history has produced some important contributions to human progress in culture, art, philosophy. I have a rather positive opinion of some of the Christian classics, such as Thomas Aquinas's philosophy, or the Church's social teachings (which are rather different from Liberation Theology), and I stand by my earlier suggestion that Hindu political ideologues would gain a lot from studying the works which inspired their natural European counterpart, the Christian Democrats.<sup>15</sup> However, a closer analysis shows that the truly important elements in these contributions are ultimately of non-Christian origin.

The intellectually most attractive elements in Christian doctrine are bits of Hellenistic philosophy co-opted by the Church

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<sup>14</sup> For a synthesis of the findings of critical Bible scholarship with the proper logical conclusions, however, we have to refer to studies by non-Christian or ex-Christian scholars, because Christians tend to avoid the consequences of their findings (e.g. by claiming that "the Jesus of history" is unknowable and unimportant). See e.g. Michael Arnheim: *op.cit.*; Robin Lane-Fox: *The Unauthorized Version. Truth and Fiction in the Bible*, Viking, London 1991; and Herman Somers: *Jezus de Messias. Was het Christendom een Vergissing?* (Dutch: "Jesus the Messiah. Was Christianity a Mistake?"), EPO, Antwerp 1986.

<sup>15</sup> For example Jacques Maritain's seminal book *Humanisme Intégral* (1936); the title should ring a bell among Hindu nationalist ideologues professing "integral humanism".

Fathers, without any prophetic or revelatory origins, apart from elements of Judaic tradition which predated Jesus and were in no way augmented or surpassed by his supposed teachings. The way Christianity incorporated them is often a superficial cover-up of the contradictions between mutually exclusive teachings. Thus, the Platonic notion of an immortal soul, which is part of Church doctrine, makes the central Christian message of the "resurrection of the body" (which originated in a Jewish tradition ignoring the notion of an afterlife) superfluous. If death does not really exist, if it is merely a step from this type of life to another type, why bother about bodily resurrection? And if we partake of the Divine nature by sharing God's immortality, where is the need for a Saviour?

On the other hand, those contributions which set Christianity apart from the prevailing religious and intellectual atmosphere in the Greco-Roman world, are not always the most desirable. Thus, Christianity's emphasis on the individual's dependence on Scriptural or Church authority has suffocated millions of people in their spiritual development and directly caused the persecution and killing of numerous freethinkers. Its contorted and repressive attitude towards human sexuality is notoriously responsible for untold amounts of psychological suffering. Add the negative attitude towards worldly pursuits including science; the sentimental fixation on a single historical person with his idiosyncratic behaviour, extolled moreover to a divine status (Jews and Muslims have a point when they consider this the ultimate in "idolatry"); the concomitant depreciation of all other types of human character (artist, warrior, householder, humorist, renunciant) in favour of the pathetic antisocial type which Jesus represented; and the morbid love of martyrdom. Our list of Christianity's failures is not complete, but is sufficient to justify the evaluation on which millions of Christian-born people have come to agree: *Christianity is not true.*

Jesus was *not* God's Only Begotten Son, and he was *not* the Saviour of mankind from its Original Sin. Historically, he was

just one of the numerous antisocial preachers going around in troubled Palestine in the period of Roman rule. He believed the End was near (definitely a failed prophecy, unless we redefine "near"), and had a rather high opinion of himself and of his role in the impending catastrophe. We can feel compassion for this thoroughly unhappy man with his miserably unsuccessful life, but we should not compensate him for his failure by elevating him to a super-human status; let alone worshipping him as Saviour and Son of God. Whatever the worth of values which Christians claim as theirs, nothing at all is gained by making people believe in a falsehood like the faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Life after Christianity**

Hindus with their conservative and pluralistic concern for the continuity of people in their respective faiths may wonder whether, for Christians, there is life after Christianity. Let me speak from my own experience. I have grown up in a Catholic family, gone to Catholic schools, and am a member of Catholic social organizations, so in a sociological sense I belong to the Catholic community. Moreover, I publish articles defending the Christians against the Islamic onslaught in foreign countries as well as against cultural aggression by Left-secularists in my own country. I also like to point to the worthwhile contributions of the Church tradition and of Christian thinkers and artists against the sweeping anti-Christian positions of some of my atheist and Hindu friends. Yet, like most of my friends from the same background, I have gradually discovered that Christianity is an illusory belief system, and without any outside intellectual or other pressures, my attachment to it has dissolved.

This step from belief in an irrational "revealed" doctrine towards truthfulness and the spirit of independent inquiry has not been a loss to me, nor to most people in the same situation that I know of. On the contrary, I have found that St. Paul's dictum is fully valid: "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

For many thoughtful Westerners, the end of Christianity has not turned out to be the end of religion and morality, contrary to the predictions of our teachers. To be sure, there has been a profound change in public morality, which is partly a liberation from repressive prejudice, but partly also a real decline in moral sensitivity and responsibility, as demonstrated by the rising crime rate and the increasing number of broken families. Christianity claims to be the solution to this problem (hence the call for a "second evangelization"), but to quite an extent it should accept the blame for this development. *By identifying religiosity and morality with its own irrational belief system, Christianity has made many people who outgrew this belief system throw out the annexes of moral responsibility and spiritual striving as well.* Now, people are needing some time to discover for themselves that religion and morality still make sense after the demise of Christianity.

### **Back to pre-Christian roots**

Though the decline of Christianity in the West brings a few problems with it, that is no reason to reverse the process. Instead, we are reconstructing religion and morality for ourselves. One of the sources of the post-Christian religious revival, numerically still marginal but of great symbolic significance, is the rediscovery of ancestral Paganism. Intellectually, this movement still lacks solidity and consistency, and finds itself associated with a variety of social and political concerns stretching across the ideological spectrum: ethnic revivalism, nationalism, ecologism, feminism, communitarianism, anarchism. Part of the reason is that in European Paganism, unlike in Hinduism, there is no historical continuity, so that (except for the well-documented Greek traditions) there is ample room for guessing and fantasizing about the historical contents of ancient Paganism: an open invitation to romantics and theosophists to project their own pet ideas onto the mute screen of the ancient religion. Perhaps that is why the most consistent neo-Pagan movement arose in Iceland, where the

memory of ancient Paganism was best preserved.

When Pope John-Paul II visited Iceland, he was received by Christian dignitaries, but the first one to address him was the country's seniormost religious leader, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson (1924-93). Originally a farmer, Beinteinsson gained fame across northern Europe as a traditional singer and songwriter (what the English call, with a term from the Celtic part of their cultural ancestry, a *bard*), and in 1972 he founded the *Asatruarfélagid*, the "society for the Ase religion", which was officially registered as a religion on 3 May 1973.<sup>16</sup> As "the whole people's invocator" (*Allsherjargodi*)<sup>17</sup> of the reconstituted ancestral religion, he spoke with mild irony to the Pope, about these "new fashions in religion" (meaning Christianity) which his tradition had seen arriving in Iceland.

The Icelandic example is being followed in other Germanic countries including North America. Celtic-based revivals are flourishing in Celtic countries or countries with a Celtic past (France, where some 40 different neo-Druid societies of divergent quality co-exist, England and Belgium). Slavic and Baltic countries have their own variety, with Russia and Lithuania being particularly fertile grounds for neo-Paganism.<sup>18</sup> In the former Soviet provinces of Tajikistan and Ossetia, there is a revival of Zoroastrianism, while forms of Shamanism are resurfacing from Kyrgyzstan to Hungary. In North America, these movements are partly absorbing those circles which were flirting earlier with Native American spirituality (sweatlodge ceremony). They now

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<sup>16</sup> *Ase* is the ancient Germanic word for "God", cognate to Sanskrit *Asura* (which simply meant "Lord" before the wars between the Vedic people and the Asura-worshipping Iranians gave it a negative meaning).

<sup>17</sup> *Godi*, like its Sanskrit cognate *hotr*, means "worshipping priest"; hence the related Germanic word *God*, "the worshipped one". In 1993, he was succeeded by Thorstein Gudjonsson. The Asatrú society publishes a periodical, *Huginn ok Muhinn*, PO Box 1159, IS-121 Reykjavik.

<sup>18</sup> Lithuania, even more than Iceland, has a fair claim to some threads of continuity with historical Paganism because of its late christianization.

accept that the Native Americans themselves don't appreciate this type of imitation and prefer European-descended people to rediscover their own Pagan heritage. While evangelists are working hard to christianize tribals in the interiors of Latin America, many christianized Native Americans are returning to their ancestral traditions. In Brazil, supposedly the world's largest Catholic country, the black and mulatto populations are taking to the elaborately polytheistic Candomblé cult, with the sympathy of growing sections of the European-descended people, who view this cult of African origin as the emerging national religion.

Most of these neo-Pagan groups are still too obviously immature, groping in the dark created by the Christian destruction of their historical roots; it is interesting to watch some of them adapt their own rituals and doctrines to new scholarly findings about their chosen religious ancestry.<sup>19</sup> We shall have to see how this line of response to the post-Christian vacuum develops; but already, its very existence poses a powerful symbolic challenge to Christianity.

Meanwhile, the biggest actual challenge to Christianity in the West is the appeal of Oriental religions. Now long past the stage of beatnik experimentation with Zen Buddhism and hippie affectations of Indian lore, the Western daughter-schools of Asian schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism are gaining in authenticity and respectability as well as in attendance numbers. Some people formally convert and declare themselves followers of these religions; many more just practise the techniques they've learned and try to live according to the teachings, all while insisting on their individual non-attachment to any organized religion. Thus, in Germany (at least among natives, as

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<sup>19</sup> Historians are gradually bringing more reliable information to light, a prime example being Ronald Hutton: *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, Blackwell, Oxford 1993. Often, this research highlights both the limitations of our knowledge of ancient Paganism, and the distance between the original and the imagined Paganism (esp. Druidry) of Theosophy or the Wicca movement. It certainly makes neo-Pagans envy the comfortable situation of Hindus with their uninterrupted age-old tradition.



opposed to the prolific Muslim immigrants), Buddhism is the fastest growing religion with some 300,000 practitioners. Even more far-reaching is the gradual penetration of small bits and pieces of Oriental heritage: most sportsmen as well as pregnant women preparing for birth now learn some elementary yogic breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) techniques, while even among Christian monks and nuns there is a substantial percentage who defy the Pope's warnings and practise non-Christian forms of meditation.

Part of Christianity's appeal among Indian tribals and fishermen is the (waning, but still palpable) prestige of the West. They should realize that the West is gradually opening up to the traditions of India and China, even while the elites of these countries are still spitting on their own heritage and pursuing westernization. Indians living in the middle of these traditions should have no problem finding a worthwhile alternative to Christianity. Even Dalits with a grudge against Hinduism should have no problem in rejecting the eager invitations of Christianity and Islam, and in following their leader Dr. Ambedkar onto the path of the Buddha. In time, closer study of the Buddha's teachings may well reveal to them that, just as Jesus was a Jew, the Buddha was a Hindu.

### **Christianity against Paganism**

It is interesting to see how the mild and harmless people who run the leftovers of the once powerful Churches in Europe suddenly show a streak of fanaticism when confronted with signs of life in the long-buried corpse of Paganism. In Iceland, the established Lutheran Church has intervened to stop the ongoing construction of a Pagan temple halfway; the government complied with the pressure and temporarily halted the construction work.<sup>20</sup> In contemporary polemical publications from the Christian side, we see a boom in attacks on what is loosely called the New Age movement, meaning the mixed bag of feminist neo-witchcraft,

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<sup>20</sup> *Iceland News*, April 1994.



ecologist philosophy ("deep ecology"), astrology, Pagan revivalism, Taoist health techniques and Hindu-Buddhist meditation. The Pope himself has condemned yoga, and in January 1995, his derogatory utterances on Buddhism provoked an anti-Pope agitation during his visit to Sri Lanka.<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, the Church leadership strongly opposes any serious criticism of Islam.<sup>22</sup> In India's Hindu-Muslim conflict, the Christian media with their world-wide impact have thrown their weight completely behind the Islamic aggressor. The reason for this uneven treatment of Paganism (in the broadest sense) and Islam is not merely the relative closeness of Islam as a fellow monotheist religion, nor just the fear which Islam inspires. Churchmen have the (correct) impression that the Pagan alternative, though softer and weaker than Islam in a confrontational sense, ultimately has a stronger appeal to the educated Western mind. They calculate that the better-educated mankind of the next century will typically go the way of today's European intellectuals, rather than the way of today's Black Muslims or Christian Dalits.

Islam's money and muscle power may look impressive, certainly capable of doing some real damage to targeted countries and societies, but Islam has no chance of becoming the religion of a science-based, space-conquering world society. Exclusivist revelations have no appeal among educated people, especially after they have acquainted themselves with the Vedantic or

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<sup>21</sup> See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, and Pope John Paul's *Mission of the Redeemer: John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*. Hindu and Buddhist intellectuals who fancy that they are in dialogue with the Jesuits, and Liberal Catholics who still believe that the declarations of the Second Vatican Council regarding non-Christian religions are valid, should study these documents carefully. Copies are available from St. Paul Publications, Bandra, Bombay.—I.S.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in May 1993, a lecture series on Islam, organized by a Catholic foundation, and in which I (K.E.) was one of the speakers, was prohibited at the last minute by the authorities of the Jesuit University in Antwerp.

Buddhist philosophies. That is why the Churches are investing huge resources in the battle for Asia's mind, where they face their most formidable enemy. That is why they are so active in India: not only is India's atmosphere of religious freedom more hospitable to them than the conditions of Islamic countries, or even of non-Islamic countries where proselytization is prohibited (countries as divergent as China, Myanmar, Israel, and, at least formally, Nepal); but they also know and fear the intrinsic superiority of the Indian religion.

### **The role of disputed places of worship**

In the present struggle to death which Christianity is waging against Hinduism, is it any use for Hindus to rake up disputes over usurped places of worship? Or, as Christians who have the preservation of their churches in mind, are wont to ask: isn't one Babri Masjid problem enough?

The Hindu response should be in proportion to the seriousness of the matter. Within the hierarchy of Hindu sacred places, I don't think that any of the most important ones has been usurped by Christianity, the Mylapore Shiva Temple being (with due respect) of secondary rank; though I admit that this is all relative. Of course, the Church itself is welcome to make a move and offer the stolen places of worship back. *In fact, until the Church voluntarily offers to give some of its illegitimate property back, there is every reason to be skeptical about its protestations of a "new spirit of dialogue"*. However, in my opinion, it may be wasteful and strategically counterproductive to start clamouring for the return of stolen places of worship.

Hindu society should be more ambitious. A place of worship may be an important focus for mobilization and consciousness-raising (*vide* Ayodhya), but it is hardly important in itself.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This is not true for the Hindu, who may believe a particular site to be sacred for a variety of reasons and continue to visit it even after a mosque or church has encroached on the consecrated area (as in the case of Ayodhya and Velankanni). However, the point being made here is well-taken and appreciated in principle.— I.S.

Better to go for the big one: attract the worshippers, and they will bring the places of worship along with them. Not the places but the offerers of worship are to be liberated from Christianity.

The fate of Hindu sacred sites at the hands of Christian missionaries, as a piece of significant historical information, may have a certain auxiliary role to play in this process of consciousness-raising. Their ruins are witnesses to the antireligious and destructive edge of a Church which now advertises itself in India as the bringer of progress and social justice. A formal "liberation of sacred sites" need not be put on the agenda, but the Hindus have every right to insist on a mental and verbal breakthrough: *Christians must acknowledge the historical fact that, from Bethlehem to Madras, most of their sacred sites are booty won in campaigns of fraud and destruction.* Since their theology urges a sense of sinfulness and guilt anyway, they should not find it too difficult to make such a confession.

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## INDEX

- A Map's Guide Book to Madras*, 173n, 232  
*A Road Guide to Madras*, 233  
 Ambedkar, Dr., 268  
 Abraham, Rev. C E., 47  
*Acts of Thomas*, 17, 19, 21, 25, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 50, 56, 67, 72, 76, 97, 104, 110, 112, 113, 116, 125, 155, 162, 172, 177 and n, 188; information furnished by, 189  
 Adam, sepulchre of, 112  
 Adigal, Vanniyar, 148  
 Agasthya, Hindu sage, made to prophesy Christ's birth, 132  
 Akalis, anti-Brahmin chorus joined by, 186  
 Alexander, David and Pat, 189  
 Alexander VI, Pope, 37n, 79 and n  
 Alexandrian, doctors, 110; traditions, 44  
 Alvares, Rodrigo, 98  
 Amaldass, Anand, 187n  
 American evangelists, 170  
 America's christianization, horrible story, of 256  
 Americas, the, nativist movement in, 259  
 anti-Brahmin, campaign, 186; leaders, 192  
 anti-Brahminism, 192; well-spring of, 193; biggest vilification campaign, 186; Christian doctrine of, 255  
 anti-Hindu fable as history, 215  
 anti-Judaism, 186  
 Aphrodite temple, demolition and replacement of, 253  
 Apocrypha, 16n  
 "Apostle of India" tradition, 109  
 Apostolic Fathers, 37  
 Apostolic Palace, orgies in, 79n  
 Appar, saint, 85  
 Aprem, Dr. Mar, 46  
 Aquinas, St. Thomas, pope's taxing of lepers and prostitutes endorsed by, 122n  
 Arabia Felix, mistaken for India, 38n  
 archaeological evidence, destruction of, 104  
 Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I.), 9, 107  
 archbishop, of Bombay, 122; of Madras, 168  
 Arnheim, Michael, 252  
 Arulappa, Archbishop Dr. R., 48, 92, 104, 129, 130, 131, 135, 136, 139, 143, 145n  
 Arun Shourie, 156, 171n, 212, 213, 214, 257, 259  
 Arunachalam, M., 81, 86  
 Arunagirinathar, saint, 95, 165, 211  
 Arya Samaj, rejects Brahminism, 192  
 "Aryan invaders", labelling the upper castes as, 259  
 Aryan Invasion theory, discredited, 15; spread by anti-Brahminism, 192 and n  
 Aseervatham, Samson, 218, 219  
 Asiatic Christianity, patron of, 49  
 Attwater, Donald, 10, 11, 36, 38n  
 Aurangzeb, 244; Francis Xavier's iconoclasm beats the record of, 213  
 Aztecs, the, 259  
 B.B.C., spreads the St. Thomas myth, 229  
 Babri Masjid controversy, no Hindu fanaticism in, 167  
 Baigent, Michael, 16n, 52n  
 Balambal, V., 87  
 Baltic countries, campaign of fraud and destruction extended to, 254; neo-Paganism in, 266  
 Bank of America, Jesuit-owned, 219  
 Barbosa, Durate, 62  
 Bardesanes of Edessa, story of Judas Thomas by, 16, 17, 18, 35, 50, 70

# Index

- Bar-Hebraeus of Tigris, Bishop, 56  
 basilica title, 154  
 Basnage, Jacques, 38  
 Belgium, neo-Druid societies in, 266  
 Benares, the myth of Jesus preaching at, 219  
 Bethlehem, Nativity Church in, 251; Christian claim to, 252  
 Betumah ("the Town of Thomas"), 222, 226 and n  
 Bhrigu Malai, the Big Mount south of Mylapore originally known as, 105  
 Bible, the, 16n, 113, 145, 152, 214; scholars, 262  
 Bible Society volunteers and Bible van, 170  
 Bibleland, huge area owned by a missionary outfit renamed as, 247  
 Bibleland Post Office, a post office renamed as, 247  
 big business and big church, ethics of, 233, 234  
 Big Mount, 104, 105, 181; "bleeding" cross discovered at, 163; see also St. Thomas Mount  
 Bishop's House at Mylapore, evidence of temple destruction hidden by, 87, 91  
 bishops in Kerala, 197, 198, 199, 200; palaces of, 247; city land held by, 247-48; vote-banks commanded by, 203  
 "bleeding" cross, 68n, 163  
 Blessed Peter, the cult of, 11  
 Borgias, the, 79n  
 Brahmin assassin of St. Thomas, missionary invention of, 116, 234  
 "Brahmin Christians", 203  
 Brahmin-killed-Thomas fable, the Portuguese propagate, 91  
 Brahminism, systematic ideological and propagandistic attack on, 186  
 Brahmins, 5, 7, 64n, 68n, 77, 78, 100, 106, 155, 172, 178, 186, 187, 191, 193, 194; 255; motivation in blackening of, 78, 190  
 Brazil, Candomblé cult in, 267  
 British, the, 165, 239, 240, 249  
 brown sahibs, 121  
 Buchanan, Claudius, 12, 13  
 Buddha, 50; mutilated image of, 91n; path of, 268  
 Buddhism, 267; Pope's derogatory utterances on, 269  
 Burkitt, F.C., 25  
 Burnell, A.D., 70  
 Cabral, Pedro Alvares, 79  
 Calicut, mistaken as a Christian city, 64  
 Calkins, Philip B., 43, 44  
 Camoens, Portuguese poet, 226  
 Canai Thomas of Syria, 163, 164  
 Case, S.J., 38  
 caste, role of, 190  
 Catholic, apologist, 156; historians, 64, 65; propaganda, 232; scholars, 35, 90, 99; scholarship, 41; theology, 77, 78, 172; universities, 227; lives of saints, 10; see also Roman Catholic  
 Catholic Church, 172, 173; a political gift to, 66; in India, 77; in Madras, 129; patrimony of, 78; see also Roman Catholic Church  
 Catholic missionaries, scene of culture murder by, 255  
 Catholic Orthodox Syrian Church, 218  
 Catholics, 116; in India, 78  
 Central Government, temples in Kerala suffer from the secular act of, 244  
 Chandrasekaran, S., Christian propagandist and shameless negationist, 214, 215  
 Charpentier, Jarl, 71, 172  
 Cheraman Perumal, 47, 50  
 Christian, anti-Brahminism, 186; apologists, 12; ashrams, 187; book on Tiruvalluvar, 146; colonialism, 241; fanaticism, 51, 161; fanatics, 235; historians, 92, 230; imperialism, 229; population of India, 179; propagandist, 215; religion, 65; scholars, 112, 113; testimony about converts reverting to Hinduism, 193; theologians, 230; church of India, 131; sacred places, 252, relics, 253; festivals, 253; fanaticism, 254; writers, 255; polemics, 255; Churches in India, 258  
 Christian aggression, 259; Hindu response to, 261  
 Christian churches in South India, 251  
 Christian craftsmen, 254n  
 Christian Democrats, 262n  
 Christian doctrine, manipulation of the textual basis of, 262; most attractive elements in, 262

- Christian desecration, standing example of, 230
- Christian history, tradition of whitewashing, 230
- Christian iconoclasm, 251, 254; dark episodes of, 255; surreptitious forms of, 255
- Christian missionaries, 5, 157, 185, 186, 188, 190, 191, 193, 216, 219, 220, 240; planting of relics, forging of documents, and writing of "histories" by, 219; Catholic and Protestant, 164; fate of Hindu sacred sites at the hands of, 269; presented as lovers of Tamil culture, 254n
- Christian missions, use of extra-territorial affiliations by, 200
- Christian monks, fraudulent donning of Hindu robes by, 258
- Christian population of Kerala, increase through forced proselytization of, 242
- Christian saints, image of, 254n
- Christian theology, logical outcome of, 251
- Christian Thomas, Muslim Thomas identified with, 111
- Christianity, 8, 66, 120, 121, 146, 163, 180, 181, 187, 188, 190, 198, 228, 241, 251, 258, 261, 264, 270; colonial, 203; exploding the doctrinal foundation of, 189; in West Asia, 17; the spread of, 79; destruction of religious pluralism by, 190; most important fact about, 261; an illusory belief system, 264; challenge to, 267
- Christianity in India, shot in the arm for, 130; the roots of, 143; origins of, 49
- Christianity's failures, list of, 263
- Christians, stories of persecution invented by, 119, 120; circular logic of, 113n
- Church, the, 257, 268; its guilt, 257; its policy, 260
- Church authorities, evidence of temple destruction hidden by, 91
- Church coffers in Kerala, golden flow from the state into, 248
- Church history, myths and inventions in, 37
- Church rhetoric, 259
- Church of England, the "secular arm" of, 229
- Church of the Holy Sepulchre, 252n
- Church of South India, discriminating treatment of Scheduled Caste converts by, 185
- churches and mosques in Kerala, fabulous wealth of, 247; hundredfold increase in the number of, 245
- Churches in India, foreign money collected by, 180; mammoth funds and properties of, 200, 204; rewards paid for conversions by, 203; riddled with caste, 178; stranglehold on education of, 202; stupendous wealth of, 201
- Churches in Kerala, 200; biggest landowners after the state, 247; countless plantations owned by, 247; big investments by, 248; near monopoly of education by, 248; front party for, 240; religious corruption by and banditry of, 204; land grants to, 241; foreign funds of, 248
- churches of Europe, built on Pagan temple sites, 91n
- Clement of Alexandria, 31, 32, 33, 34
- Cochin, St. Thomas Foot or the famous curse of, 69
- Coelho, Fr. Gaspar, 105
- Columbus' discovery of America, Church's intention behind, 256
- Communist historians and sociologists, history of India rewritten by, 194
- condoms, produced alongside Catholic propaganda, 232
- Congress Government in Kerala, plundering of temples and protection of churches and mosques by, 244
- Congress Party Souvenir, Guruvayur Dewasom forced to pay for, 245
- Constantine, Roman emperor, 11n, 16n, 251, 252; christianization of Rome by, 45 and n; Donation of, 37n
- Constantius, Roman emperor and Christian criminal, 45n, 46n
- Constitution, 120, 124, 148, 195, 197; fraud perpetrated on, 196
- converts, generous help provided to, 198
- Correa, Gaspar, the narrative of, 93, 94
- Cortés, Hernán, conquest of Mexico by, 258, 259
- Cosmas the Alexandrian, 47
- Council, of Diamper, 178, 184; of Goa, 178; of Nicea, 16n, 45n
- Craig, David, 229

- Cranganore, 40, 41, 45, 50, 180  
 Cutner, Herbert, 37
- da Atongia, Pedro, 107  
 da Gama, Vasco, 64 and n, 256  
 Dahlman, Jesuit J., 39, 155, 162  
 Dalit Christians, 12, 179, 182, 196  
 Dalit rights, plunder of, 203  
 Dalit and Adivasi movements, 259  
 Dante Alighieri, author of *The Divine Comedy*, 56  
 D'Cruz, Chevalier F.A., 41, 43, 109  
 de Athaide, Gabriel, 105  
 de Britto, John, 184; planned "martyrdom" of, 120n  
 de la Vallee-Poussin, L., 38, 155, 162, 172  
*De Miraculis Thomae*, 67, 97, 100, 104  
 de Nobili, Robert, 184, 187 and n  
 de Tillemont, Louis-Sebastian Le Nain, 38 and n  
 de Varthema, Lodovico, 62  
 Dead Sea Scrolls, 52n  
 dei Conti, Niccolo, 62  
 dei Marignolli, Bishop Giovanni, 62, 114  
 Deivanayakam, "Dr." M., the spurious dissertation of, 145  
 Dharmapuram Shaiva Math, 145, 146, 147  
 Diocletian, Roman emperor, 16n  
 "Didymus", meaning of, 19n  
 Divine Twins, Greek cult of, 53  
 Dominicans, 91  
 Doordarshan, spread of the St. Thomas myth by, 229  
 Dorotheus of Tyre, 57n  
 dove-and-cross motif, 48  
 D'Souza, Fr. Herman, 48, 68n, 103, 104, 168, 169  
 D'Souza, Vincent, 228  
 Dubois, Abbe, 193
- early Christian churches in India, origin of, 9  
 East India Company, 222  
 Edessa, 17, 18, 53, 110, 163  
 Edmunds, Dr. T., 46, 221  
 Eisler, Robert Issac, 52n  
 Ekambaranath, A., 88, 156, 158, 173  
 Elst, Koenraad, 6 and n, 194n  
*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 41, 44, 49, 73; the editor of, 43; St. Thomas entry in, 42  
 Ephraim of Edessa, 33, 36
- Essenes, 52 and n  
 Eucharist, ritual cannibalism in, 96n  
 European and Christian imperialism, whitewash job on, 229  
 Eusebius of Caesarea, 33, 34, 42, 108  
 Eutychians, 12 and n  
 exclusivist revelations, 269  
*Express Weekend*, 154, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 168, 169, 183, 209, 210, 211 and n, 212, 213
- Faber-Kaiser, A., 7n  
 faked excavation, 252  
 Farquhar, Dr. J.N., 39, 155, 162  
 Fernandez, Diogo, 62, 96, 97, 98 and n, 105; depositions of, 99; "St. Thomas" relic of, 102  
 Fernandez, Ivan, 187n  
 fifteenth century popes, 79  
 Firth, C.B., 31, 38n, 46, 47, 79, 108  
 Forbes, Duncan, 14  
 foreign religion, enticements offered by, 204  
 France, neo-Druid societies in, 266  
 Franciscans, 8, 81, 86, 91, 181, 182, 187  
 French, the, 85  
 Furneau, Rupert, 11n, 19n, 52n
- Gandhiji, 184  
 Ganesh, Janakiram, 137  
 Ganesh, John, 129, 130, 131, 132, 134, 137, 138  
 Garbe, Richard, 38, 155, 162, 172  
 Gauda Saraswats, fleeing from Goa of, 165  
 Gelletti, A., 87  
 Gerini, Colonel, 110, 226n  
 German scholars, evidence of temple destruction and church construction collected by, 91  
 Germanic countries, campaign of fraud and destruction extended to, 254; neo-Paganism in, 266  
 Germany, Buddhism in, 266  
 Gibbon, Edward, 49, 54, 96n  
*Gita*, 167  
 Gnostic, Christianity, 50; Gospels, 76n  
 Gnosticism, 17, 36, 70  
 Gnostics, 35  
 Goa, 165; destruction of temples in, 91; widespread caste discrimination by churches in, 191

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

- God Subramanian, Christians see Prophet Mani in, 15  
 Goddess Mariamman, Christians see Mar Ammon in, 15  
 Goel, Sita Ram, 64n, 77, 82, 146, 155, 161, 168, 172, 230, 231  
 Golconda Sultans, attack on Santhome by, 153  
 Gondeshapur, 51  
 Gondophernes, 42  
 Gopalakrishnan, C.V., 221, 223  
*Gospel of Thomas*, St. Thomas in, 76  
*Gospel* writers, 252  
 Gouthaman, Paul, 137  
 Government of India, the myth of St. Thomas cultivated by, 41, 125  
 Gregory XV, Pope, 76, 178, 190  
 "grove of Thomas", replaces "pool of Vishnu", 107  
 Gundaphorus, 22 and n; see also Gondophernes  
 Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple Dewaswom, 240; planned plunder of, 244, 245, 246, 249; noise about the wealth of, 244  
  
 Hadrian I, Pope, 37n  
 hagiographical literature, lack of historical interest in, 10  
 Hari, T.S.V., 235  
 "Harijan Christians", 196, 198  
 Harnack, A., 38, 155, 162, 172  
 Heracleon the Gnostic, 70  
 Herbert, Thomas, 57n  
 Heras, Fr. H., 73, 79  
*Hindu, The*, 9n, 75, 146n, 212, 217, 223n, 226n; class conscious, casteist and fashionably anti Hindu, 220, spiteful response from, 223; sells a vicious communal tale, 234  
 Hindu assassin of St. Thomas, portrayal of, 68n  
 Hindu craftsmen, images of Christian saints made by, 254n  
 Hindu society, counter attack by, 260-61; Christian mobilization of the weak sections of, 258  
 Hindu martyrdom, monument of, 5  
 Hindu publishers, promotion of the St. Thomas myth by, 75  
 Hindu scholars, react to St. Thomas story, 230-31  
 Hindu society, untrue description of, 177; counter-attack by, 260-61; Christian mobilization of the weaker sections of, 258  
 Hindu temples, 219, 249; spree of destruction of, 165  
 "Hindu tolerance", the marketable commodity of, 223  
 Hindu tradition, Christian historian ignores, 14  
 Hindu Voice International, 235n  
 Hindu wealth to non-Hindus, transferring of, 247  
 Hindu and Buddhist intellectuals, 269n  
 Hinduism, 5, 22n, 160, 181, 190, 228, 265, 267; psychological disarmament of, 167; no martyr-mongering in, 5; vicious attempt to delegitimize and destroy, 258; Christianity totally unacceptable as an alternative to, 261  
*Hinduism Today*, promotion of the St. Thomas myth by, 229  
 Hindus, 85, 181, 242, 243, 246, 256, 264; convent-educated, 7  
 Hindus, persecution of, 8  
 Hindus of Kerala, 240, 245, 246, 248; jolted by the plight of their temples, 240, 242; foil the politicians, 243; acceptance of self-hate and self-destruction as Secularism by, 250  
 Hindustan, nothing Hindu in, 15  
 Hippolytus of Portus, 57n, 110  
 Holy Cross Church in Jerusalem, Christian claim to the site of, 252  
 Hosten, Fr. H., 88, 89, 90, 92, 99  
 Hough, Rev. James, 38, 71  
 Hussein, Muzaffer, 229  
 Hyder Ali, attacks on Santhome by, 153  
  
 Iceland, Lutheran Church in, 268  
 Icelandic neo-Paganism, 265-266  
 Ide, Arthur Frederick, 119  
 "idolatry", the ultimate in, 263  
 India, as known to early European geographers, 22n, 108, 111, 155, 162, 172; confused with Arabia Felix and Ethiopia, 38n, 59n, 102n; Christian and Muslim problem in, 251; sixteenth and seventeenth century churches in, 254  
 Indian archaeologists, investigation of

## Index

- churches neglected by, 91
- Indian Christian, Church, 179; mythology, 12; tradition, 14
- Indian Christianity, serious indictment of, 119
- Indian Christians, intolerance of, 120, 258; claims of high caste descent by, 191
- Indian Church, the, 259
- Indian Council of Philosophical Research, the St. Thomas myth promoted by, 187n
- Indian Express*, 9n, 75, 102n, 146n, 159, 160, 166, 167, 169, 173n, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 209n, 212n, 214n, 220, 225, 227, 228, 232, 234; double standards of, 157; Harry Miller's column in, 171; lies about Hindu society in, 211; editors of, 154, 156, 158, 168, 173; negativist editorial policy of, 254n
- Indian history, wholesale revision of, 223
- Indian philosophy, the Jesuit definition of, 187n
- Indian republic, Christian-dominated states in, 260
- India's Hindu-Muslim conflict, support of Islamic aggression by Christian media in, 269
- India's political leaders, ignorance and arrogance of, 74
- India's political parlance, dogma in, 194
- India's Vedic heritage, 122
- Indira Vikas Patrika, Guruvayur Dewasom forced to invest in, 245
- Inquisition, second and new, 203, 205
- Inquisition of Goa, Syrian bishop burnt alive by, 65; forcible subjection of the Syrian Church by, 119
- International Institute of Tamil Studies, publication of spurious thesis by, 146, 147
- Ishwar Sharan, 146, 157, 160, 161
- Isidore of Seville, 57n
- Islam, 240; onslaught of, 190
- Israel, 270
- Iyadigal Kadavarkon, Shaivite prince, 95
- Iyer, Ganesh, 129, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137; see also Ganesh, Janakiram; Ganesh, John; Gouthaman, Paul; Paul, Acharya
- Jacobite Church, 182
- Jain images, buried in the nunnery at San Thome, 89
- Jain temple, 12th century records of San Thome region refer to, 88
- James, Montague Rhodes, 19
- Jefferson, Thomas, on the Christian God, 120
- Jerusalem Christians, 182
- Jesuit Philosophical Research Institute, 187n
- Jesuits, 8, 65, 66, 81, 82, 86, 91, 103, 104, 181, 182, 183, 187, 219
- Jesus, 255, 261, 268; making him live up to *Old Testament* prophecy, 252; his venerable foreskin, 253
- Jesus Christ, 19, 21, 24, 50, 53, 112, 120, 121n, 125, 152, 170, 171, 177, 188, 189, 215, 219, 222, 223, 229, 231; a slave trader, 189; story of, 10; vicar of, 79n; falsehood that is faith in, 264
- Jesus-in-India story, 7
- Jews, the, 255, 263
- Jivan*, Jesuit magazine, 187n
- Jnanasambandar, saint, 85, 95, 165, 166, 211; see also Sambandar and Tirujnansambandar
- Job, K.E., 38
- John XXII, Pope, 51
- John of Monte Corvino, Friar, 58
- John Paul II, Pope, 178, 179, 257, 266, 268, 269n
- Jones, Hans, 18
- Jordan, Bishop, 51
- Joseph, T.K., 69, 70, 73, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116, 219
- Judas Thomas, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 43, 50, 53, 177, 222
- Justin, Christian apologist, 120
- Jyotirmayananda, Swami, 157, 158, 210n, 211
- Kalahasti, attack on temples of, 82
- Kamakoti*, privately-owned journal of Kanchi Shankracharya Math threatened by Christian fanatics, 235
- Kanchipuram, plundering raid on temples of, 81
- Kapaleeswara Temple in Mylapore, 9, 59n, 69n, 82, 85, 86, 95, 156, 158, 165, 166, 173, 211, 228, 232, 233, 235n; at old shore, 87; at present 87, 95, 159; encroachment on, 101

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

- Karunakaran, K., transfer of temple funds from banks to state treasury by, 240; re play of the Munro scenario by, 249
- Kashmir, myth of Jesus dying in, 219
- "Kayastha Christians", 203
- Kaye, Sir John, 38
- Kerala, 91, 179, 180, 199, 239; anti-Hindu politicians of, 248; bishops and mother superiors of 248; Christian and Muslim encroachers on forest lands in, 244; Christian community of, 164; Christian population of, 242; Church-backed encroachers of, 246; destruction of Hindu temples in, 91; foreign funded churches and mosques in, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248; Congress Government of, 247; double-dealing politicians of, 243, 244, 246, 248; successive governments of, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248; Muslim population of, 242; temple lands in, 242, 244; "St. Thomas" Christians of, 182; United Democratic Government in, 240; misuse of temple funds in, 240, 249; golden flow from state to Church coffers in, 248; bishops and convents in, 247; temple priests of, 244-45; *wakf* properties in, 245; Hindu women of, 246; Hindus of, 240, 242, 243; temples of, 240, 243, 244; Colonel Munro in, 241, 242, 243; Christian colonialism in, 241; Muslim League in, 240, 248; Kerala Congress in, 240, 248; doings of K. Karunakaran in, 240; forced conversion and fierce proselytization in, 242; mark of secularism in, 244; "minorities" in, 244; Land Reform Act of, 244; Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in, 199-200; population of, 245
- Kerala Christians, different from converts by latter-day missionaries, 164; traditional belief of, 181
- Kerala Congress, a front party for the Churches, 240; willing hostages of, 248
- Kerala Government, 243, 244, 248; anti-Hindu acts of, 245; controlled by Christians and Muslims, 245; Church-backed encroachers patronized by, 246; Hindu pleas ignored by, 243; misuse of Hindu women's donations by, 246; transfer of Hindu wealth to non-Hindus by, 247
- King of Portugal, San Thome made a diocese by, 101
- Knae Thomman, 180
- Koran* over *Tirukkural*, showing the superiority of, 148
- Krishnamachari, T.T., 232
- Krishnaswami Reddiar, Justice N., 146
- Kulanday, Victor J.F., 67
- Kulkarni, Jeevan, 193
- Kural, 85; see also *Tirukkural*
- Khushwant Singh, 230, 231
- La Croze, 38
- Lakshmi Bai, Rani, of Travancore, forced by the British to accept their Resident as Dewan, 241
- Land Reforms Act in Kerala, greatest beneficiaries of, 244; Church plantations kept outside the purview of, 247
- Latourette, K.S., 46, 73, 180
- Leo X, Pope, 10
- Leigh, Richard, 16n, 52n
- Leo XIII, Pope, 72
- Levi, 7n
- Levi, Sylvain, 73
- Liberation Theology, 177, 178, 259, 261, 262; under the aegis of, 258
- Limca Book of Records*, nailed as the "Coca-Cola Book of Lies", 217
- Lincoln, Henry, 16n, 52n
- Lithuania, forced conversion of, 254; particularly fertile ground for neo-Paganism, 266
- Little Mount at Saidapet, 103, 153, 163, 181, 222; Hindu traditions about, 103
- little popes, secular scribes behave like, 121
- Lo Bello, Nino, 122n
- Love, Henry, 40, 51, 54, 82
- Luz Church, 69n, 107; built on temple site, 173n
- McCabe, Joseph, 45n, 79n
- Mackenzie Manuscripts, 88
- MacLeod, Rev. Norman, 193
- Madame Dupliex, destruction of Vedapuri Iswaran Temple by, 82, 84
- Madison, James, on Christianity, 3
- Madonna of the Mount, church of, 163
- Madonna with the Babe Jesus, Isis and Horus turned into, 253
- Madras, English-language dailies in, 225



- Madras Musings*, Catholic fortnightly, 107, 108, 225, 227, 233
- Mahadevan, king of Mylapore, 104
- Maharaja of Kashmir, 193
- Mahmud of Ghazni, 33n
- Malabar, a missionary outfit in, 247; origin of the Christians in, 49; encroachment on the vast forest lands of temples in, 244
- Maliankara (Cranganore in Kerala), St. Thomas made to land at, 152
- Manhattan, Avro, 11, 122n
- Mani, prophet of Persia, 15, 50, 51
- Manichaean, canon, 50; invocation, 24
- Manichaeism, 50
- Mar Solomon of Basra, Metropolitan, 56
- Mar Isho Yahb, 44
- Mar Thiomothy, 44
- Maraini, Fosco, 55
- Marco Polo, 55, 56, 57, 59n, 60, 61, 89-90, 91, 111, 151, 169, 211, 222, 226
- Mark Twain's observation, on the speed with which lies spread, 223
- Martin, Malachi, 123n
- martyrolatrous religion, requirement of, 96
- Marxist professors, lugubrious drivel of, 220
- Marxists, anti-Brahmin chorus joined by, 186
- mass conversions, well-laid plans for, 203
- Mathew, P.V., 15, 57n
- Mead, G.R.S., 18
- Media efforts, Christian-cum-secularist, 188
- Medlycott, Bishop A.E., 39, 40, 41, 43, 70, 108, 155, 162
- Menachery, George, 64, 168
- Menezes of Goa, Archbishop, 119
- Michael, archangel, 253
- Miller, Harry, 173, 212
- Mingana, Dr. A., 16, 39, 108
- "minorities" in Kerala, monolithic, anti-secular and powerful organizations of, 244
- Mir Jumla, attack on Santhome by, 153
- missionary, indoctrination, 192; machine, 191; version of Indian history, 191
- Mohammed, the prophet, 37n
- Mohammed bin Qasim, 193
- Moraes, Frank M., 43
- Moran Sabarisho, saint of St. Thomas Christians, 15
- Moses, 37n, 50, 114
- Mother Teresa, 122n
- Mudaliar, Arunai Vadivel, 145, 146, 148
- Mundadan, Fr. A. Mathias, 13, 14, 30, 92
- Munro, Colonel, committed missionary-cum-Resident-cum-Dewan, 241, 242, 243; scenario of, 249; expropriation of temple lands by, 242; operation to annihilate temples by, 241
- Murugan temple, the Portuguese destroy, 181
- Murugesu Mudaliar, N., 86
- Muslim iconoclasm, exposure of, 212
- Muslim League, 240, 248
- Muslim League in Kerala, willing hostages of, 248
- Muslim population in Kerala, increase through forced conversion of, 242
- Muslim Thomas, identified with Christian Thomas, 111
- Muslims, 269; anti-Brahmin chorus joined by, 186; destruction of temples by, 156, 235n
- Muthiah, S., 108, 162, 225, 226n, 227, 228, 233
- Mylapore, 30, 41, 42, 43, 55, 56, 60, 62, 67, 73, 85, 95, 104, 111, 151, 153, 155, 163, 165, 181, 217, 218, 222, 226, 227; Bishop's House at, 91; christianized history of, 99; cover-up of the destruction of temples in, 116; Descanco Church in, 106; extensive ruins in, 93; Hindus of, 101; identification of the tomb in, 111; King of, 104; most enduring "gift" to, 66; old town of, 87; story of, 15
- Myanmar, 270
- Nagaswamy, Dr. R., 9n, 87, 91n, 147, 212
- nāmam*, the fraud revealed by the discovery of, 106
- Nambiar, P.K., 85
- Nandita Krishna, 221, 223, 226n, 234
- Narayanaswami, R.S., 230n
- National Geographic*, spreads the St. Thomas myth, 228-229
- National Ministry of Education, 124
- Native American spirituality, 266
- Native Americans, 257; christianized, 267
- Nativity and Holy cross sites, 253
- Nativity Church of John the Baptist, Aphrodite temple replaced by, 253

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

- nativist movement, 259
- Nayanmars, 146
- Nazaranis (Nazarenes), 52-53, 164 and n
- Nazarene hierarchy of Jerusalem, 53
- Nazareth, 164n
- negationist Christian propaganda, 228
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 74, 140
- Neill, Bishop Stephen, 39, 155, 162, 172, 227
- Neminathaswami temple at Mylapore, destruction of, 156, 158, 173
- neo-Druid societies, 266
- neo-Pagan movement, 265; most consistent in Iceland, 265
- neo-Pagan groups, 266
- Nestorian, Christians, 12 and n, 74, 164n, 222, 226; Church, 51
- New Age movement, attacks on, 268
- New Testament, 76; books, 16n, 38n
- newspaper editors, misuse of reader's trust by, 216
- Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., 80
- North-East, armed insurrection in, 203; separatist role of missionaries in, 260,
- Notovitch, Nicolas, 7n
- Odoric of Pordenone, 58, 59n, 60
- "Old Widow of Mount Road", the, *The Hindu* known as, 220
- O'Hair, M. Murray, 122n
- Olschki, Leonardo, 49, 57, 59n, 60
- Organiser*, New Delhi, 145n, 230; spreads the St. Thomas myth, 229
- Oriental religions, appeal of, 267
- Origen, 31, 33, 34, 96n
- Orthodox Church of Syria, 164
- Ortona St. Thomas bone, 41, 69n, 72, 102
- our intellectuals, ostrich-like posture of, 234
- Our Lady of Expectation Church, 68n, 105, 173n
- Our Lady of Health Church, 69n, 104; built on temple site, 173n
- Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Cathedral at Pondicherry, built on the site of Vedapuri Iswaran Temple, 84n
- P.T.I., propagates the St. Thomas myth, 228
- Padmanabhan, S., 131
- Pagan alternative, appeal to, 269
- Pagan sacred sites, christianization of, 253
- Pagan site, Christian practice when building a church on, 105
- Pagan-priest-with-a-lance story, 67
- Paganism, rediscovery of, 265; signs of life in the long-buried corpse of, 268; uneven treatment of, 269
- Paine, Thomas, on the *Bible*, 113
- Palayam, dilapidated temple but grand church and mosque at, 249
- Palayur, relics of Hindu temples near the church at, 68n, 92
- Palayur, Varghese, 70, 99
- Pallavas, Christians see Persians in, 15; Mylapore in the days of, 58n, 59n
- Panikkar, K.M., 65
- Pantaenus the Alexandrian, 108, 38n
- paranghi* priests and pirates, 227
- Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane, 82
- Parthia, 31, 32, 34, 42, 147
- Passio Thomae*, 67, 97; *Elioforum* of, 110
- Paul, Acharya, 129, 132, 133, 137, 142, 143; see also Ganesh, John; Iyer, Ganesh
- Paul IV, Pope, 11
- Paul, Raymond Jones, 123n
- Peeters, the Bolandist, 38
- Persia, persecution of Christians in, 5
- Phule, Jotirao, anti-Brahminism of, 192
- pious fictions and historical research, 71
- Pius IX, Pope, 37n
- Pius XI, Pope, 72
- Pius XII, Pope, 11, 101, 154, 161
- political hate rhetoric, an unusual feat of, 259
- politicians of Kerala, double dealing by, 242, perfidy towards Hindus of, 248
- Pondicherry, Hindu temples destroyed at, 91
- "pool of Vishnu", replaced by "grove of Thomas", 107
- Poompavai, 88 and n, 166
- Poompavai Padikum Thevaram*, 165
- Pope, 65, 79, 101, 122, 143, 256; Alexander VI, 37n, 79 and n; Gregory XV, 76, 178, 190; Hadrian I, 37n; John XXII, 51; John Paul II, 178, 179, 264, 265, 267n; Leo X, 10; Leo XIII, 72; Paul IV, 11, 133; Pius IX, 37n; Pius XI, 72; Pius XII, 11, 101, 154, 161; in Rome, 157
- Portugal, 66

- Portuguese, the, 7, 8, 40, 42, 43, 48, 65, 66, 67, 68n, 69, 85, 86, 87, 91, 97, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 116, 118, 119, 122n, 161, 164, 165, 181, 186, 222, 223n, 226, 227, 228, 235n, 256; account, 99; adventurers, 79; Catholic missionaries, 173; fakes, 117; invention, 15; ruse, 147; great destruction caused by, 88; myths floated by, 219; open admission by, 92
- Portuguese pirates, Church's close cooperation with, 78
- post-Christian vacuum, response to, 267
- post-independence Hindu newspaper publishers, "principles" followed by, 183
- Protestant, Churches, 123n, 188; missionaries, 164
- Protestant fundamentalism, contention of, 253n
- Protestant missionaries, scene of culture murder by, 255
- Ptolemy, 110, 226n
- Rabban Pattu*, 69, 70, 99
- Radhakrishnan, Dr. S., countenancing of the St. Thomas myth by, 74
- Rae, Rev. Dr. G. Milne, 35, 113
- Rajendra Prasad, Dr., propagation of St. Thomas myth by, 74, 168, 169
- Ram Swarup, 167
- Rama Raya, raja of Vijayanagar, 86
- Ramachandra Dikshitar, V.R., 87
- Ramachandran, T.N., 148
- Ramakrishna Rao, K.V., 215, 219
- Ramanathan, K.V., 209, 210, 212,
- Ramanuja, 106
- Rampan Song*, 111
- Rao, Venkoba, 89
- Rapson, Prof. E.J., 73
- Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph, pronouncements of, 269n
- Reader's Digest*, a secular Christian missionary organ, 229
- religious revival, post-Christian, 265
- Roman Catholic, bigotry, 119, imperium, 201; missionaries, 13, 80; propaganda, 169; romance, 172; scholars, 18; scholarship, 13; Christianity, 121
- Roman Catholic bishop of Madras, the palace of, 87
- Roman Catholic Church, 8, 65, 75, 118, 125, 172, 173, 181, 182, 185, 188, 190, 201, 202, 211, 213, 227; first choice of, 116, in India, 70, 77; deceitful nature of in Madras, 12, 129; patrimony of, 78; a political gift to, 66; persistence of caste discrimination in, 191; untouchability practised in, 178; largest and richest landlord, 201; tradition of fabricating religious relics in, 100n; vast resources poured into India by, 123n
- Rufinus of Aquileia, 34
- rules of confession, an application of, 257
- Sabarimala Sri Sasta Temple, denial of basic amenities to pilgrims of, 246
- Sacred Congregation of Rites at Rome, 72n
- "sacred place", Christian concept of, 251
- Sambandar, saint, 85
- Samson, an early Nazarene, 52
- San Thome, 72, 151, 152, 153, 154; bones at, 102; landship on the beach of, 85; site of the present church at, 86, 226, 227
- San Thome Cathedral, 91, 222, 223n, 233; temple stones found in the walls and foundation of, 90; built on temple sites, 173; Chola records found in, 88; carved stones in the churchyard of, 87n; see also Santhome Church
- San Thome Cathedral Museum, temple relics in, 87n
- Sankaranar, Vidwan Ambai, 147
- Santhome Church, 159, 161, 165, 166, 217, 235; excavations at, 147
- "Sapper, The", *The Hindu* known as, 220
- Sapru, S., 214, 216, 219
- Saviour, where is the need of, 263
- Scheduled Caste Christians, 178, 179, 185, 196, 198, 200, 201, 202
- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Christian inspired conversion of, 195; cultural genocide of, 200; war of attrition waged on, 205
- Schurhammer, Georg, 99
- Scriptural or Church authority, 263
- Second Vatican Council, going back on pronouncements of, 269n
- secular intellectuals, acceptance of the St. Thomas myth by, 12
- "secular", journalists, 185; scribes, 121
- "secular, socialist" republic of India, official doctrine of, 194

## *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

- Secularism, Hindus accepting self-hate and self-destruction as, 250; mask of, 244; high priests of, 252
- Secularists, anti-Brahmin chorus joined by, 186
- self-styled Hindu source-book, 229
- Semitic iconoclasm, speaking about, 167
- Seshadri, C.P., 209, 212, 214, 216
- Sethna, K.D., 192n
- Severy, Merle, 229
- Shaiva Siddhanta, Catholic distortion of, 145
- Shaiva Siddhanta Sabha, "Dr." M. Deivanayakam's thesis on Tiruvalluvar questioned by, 146
- Shamanism, resurfacing of, 266
- Shanti Ashram at Madras, the story of, 141
- Shaw, Bernard, 231
- Shiva temple at Mylapore, destruction of, 156, 159, 173, 181
- Simon, C.A., 75, 76, 159, 160, 166, 168, 169, 177, 180, 183, 188, 209, 211, 219
- Singh, V.P., anti-Brahminism of, 194
- Sister Nivedita Academy, 235n
- Sivaprakasham, C.K., 88, 156, 158, 173
- slavery, Christian apology for, 189
- Slavic countries, campaign of fraud and destruction extended to, 254; neo-Paganism in, 266
- Smith, Vincent A., 70
- social and educational services, gentle penetration through, 258
- Socrates of Constantinople, 34
- Somasundaram, M.P., 146
- Sophronius of Jerusalem, 57n
- South Korea, Jesuit strategy succeeds in, 187
- Spanish, the, 256
- Spear, T.G. Percival, 118, 120
- Sri Aurobindo, 171n
- St. George, 253
- St. Gregory, Hindu temples at Taron destroyed by, 33n
- St. John, stories about, 96 and n
- "St. Luke", icons by, 106n
- Sri Kapuleeswara, God of Mylapore, 85
- St. Paul, 53n, 178, 189, 190; on slavery, 189n, 261; his dictum, 264
- St. Peter, the tomb of, 11, 12; on slavery, 261
- St. Thomas, story of the bones of, 98, 100, 101n; new role for, 177; problem of, 112; tomb of, 12, 56, 57, 95, 99, 105, 110, 151; ancient lie about, 212; new role for, 112; ready-made martyr, 77; cathedral, 86; Basilica, 163, 173; Church, 5, 85, 156, 158, 211; curiosities, 116; dissertations, 116; "half church" of, 219; legend, 66, 67, 188; different root legends about, 115n; as a mascot of inculturation, 187n; natural death of, 270; preposterous claims for, 76; protagonists, 14; religion, 51; romances, 39; sites, 103; South Indian tradition of, 111; hymn, 117; anti-social character of, 189
- St. Thomas at Cranganore, the landing of, 72
- St. Thomas Biography*, alleged but non-existent, 69
- "St. Thomas" Christian bibles, 16
- "St. Thomas" Christians, 12, 13, 15, 115; the appellation of, 62, 114; in Kerala, 182; untouchability rampant among, 76; see also Thomas Christians
- "St. Thomas" crosses, 47, 48, 105
- St. Thomas fable, criticism of, 113; promoter of, 225; repeating the, 233; South Indian version of, 69
- St. Thomas Foot or the famous curse of Cochin, 69
- St. Thomas in India, the story of, 41
- St. Thomas in Mylapore, martyrdom of, 229
- St. Thomas in South India, the evidence against, 73
- St. Thomas Mount, 41, 43, 72n, 153, 162, 163, 222, 226; the cross on, 48; see also Big Mount
- St. Thomas myth, evolution of 62; role of, 230; new purveyors of, 234
- "St. Thomas" relics, belief in, 49, 106, 109
- St. Thomas Song*, 69, 73, 99, 115
- St. Thomas story, 8, 12, 13; articles promoting the, 219; South Indian, 70
- St. Thomas tale, motivated promoter of, 233; repeating the same, 63
- "St. Thomas" tomb, 62; the first, 102; the second, 102
- St. Thomas's tomb at Mailapur, authenticity of, 58
- Subramuniaswami, Satguru Sivaya, self-

## Index

- styled Hindu source-book written by, 229  
 Sundara Murthi, Vidwan, 147  
 Synod of Diamper, 119  
 Syrian books, burning of, 119  
 Syrian Christianity, 44  
 Syrian Christians, 7, 8, 13, 51, 52, 54, 60, 64, 65, 66, 92, 111, 118, 164, 181, 218; temple breaking by, 68n  
 Syrian Church, 5, 8, 44, 114  
  
 T.T. Maps and Publications Ltd., 75, 108, 233  
 Talageri, Shrikant G., 192n  
 Tamil Christians, 84  
 Tamil coastline, destruction of Hindu temples along, 91  
 Taoism, 267  
 Tapasyananda, Swami, 164n, 168, 180, 181, 182, 183, 210, 211 and n, 212 and n, 235  
 Taron on the Euphrates, St. Gregory destroys Hindu temples at, 33n  
 Taylor, Joan, 251, 253  
*Teaching of the Apostles*, 32  
 Temple-breakers, invariable practice of, 90  
 temple destruction, evidence of, 48  
 temples, plunder and demolition of, 80, 81  
 temples of Kerala, 241, 243, 245; war of attrition waged on, 244; devastation suffered by, 234, 239; destitution of the priests of, 244-45; expropriation and encroachment on the lands of, 242, 244; first operation organized against, 241; want of funds for upkeep of and rituals in, 243; lowly status of, 245, 249  
 Thambiran, Swaminatha, 147  
 the great Portuguese lie, 233  
 theology of inculturation, patron saint of, 187  
 Thiruvalluvar, see Tiruvalluvar  
 "Thomas", meaning of, 19n, 61n  
 Thomas Cananeus, 5, 180  
 Thomas Cannaneo, 46  
 Thomas Christians in Kerala, historicity of, 182  
 Thomas Didymus, 222; see also Judas Thomas  
 Thomas of Cana, 5, 46, 50, 51, 54, 118, 163, 164 and n, 180, 217; see also Canai  
 Thomas of Syria, Knae Thomman, Thomas Cannaneo  
 Thomas, Raju, 178, 180, 181, 182, 183, 185  
 Tibetans, 260  
 Tipu Sultan, destruction of two thousand temples in Malabar by, 240, 249; forcible conversions by, 242  
 Tiruchendur Murugan Temple, the Portuguese sack of, 81  
 Tirujnanasambandar, 165, 166; see also Jnanasambandar  
*Tirukkural*, 131, 141, 145, 146, 147; see also *Kural*  
 Tirupati, invites predatory attention, 80  
 Tiruvalluvar, 85 and n, 130, 131, 132, 139, 140, 142, 146, 147, 148, 226, 227  
 Tisserant, Eugene Cardinal, 41, 51  
 Torcato, Rev. Dr. Lourenco C., 122  
 Toynbee, Arnold, 9  
 Treaty of Tordesillas, the world distributed between the Portuguese and the Spanish by, 256  
  
 United Democratic Government of Kerala, dominated by the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League, 240  
 University of Madras, awards doctorate on a spurious thesis, 147  
 untouchable Christians, 179  
  
 Varadappan, Sarojini, 147  
 Varghese, Anu, 225  
 Vasistha, Hindu sage, made to prophesy Christ's birth, 132  
 Vatican, the, 70, 72, 133, 143, 201; finances, 201  
 Ved Prakash, 8n, 48, 100, 156, 157, 158, 173, 210, 211  
*Vedanta Kesari, The*, 167, 181, 212, 235  
 Vedantham, T.R., 54  
 Vedapuri Iswaran Temple at Pondicherry, the destruction of, 82, 83, 85  
 Vel Ilang Kanni Devi Temple, Christian take over of, 81n  
 Venugopal, P., 228  
 Verghese, B.G., 228  
 Victoria Terminus in Bombay, site of a Hindu temple occupied by, 82  
 Vidal, Gore, 8n  
 Vidyakar, S., assault by Christians on, 120n  
 Virgin Mary, replaces Hindu Goddess in a

*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*

- temple, 81n  
Vishnu temple on Big Mount, destruction of, 181  
Viswamithra, Hindu sage, made to prophesy Christ's birth, 132  
Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanya Kumari, attempt to turn it into a Virgin Mary shrine, 255  
vocal "secularists", St. Thomas myth supported by, 5  
Voice of India, 211  
  
Waite, Judge C.B., 37  
*Week, The*, spreads the St. Thomas myth, 228  
Wells, H.G., 122n  
West, the, traditions of India and China revive in, 266  
Western "Christian" calender, 253n  
Whiteway, R.S., 86, 93  
  
"Why not?" argument, the psychological device of, 14  
Winckworth, C.P.T., 47n  
Winternitz, Maurice, 38  
Wise Men from the East, fraudulent identification of, 214-15  
World Council of Churches, 123n; Darwin Declaration of, 260  
  
Xavier, St. Francis, 15, 65, 77, 80 and n, 99, 184, 186, 213, 217, 254  
  
Yallap, David, 122n  
yantra stones at St. Thomas sites, 93  
Yule, Sir Henry, 59n, 60, 72  
  
Ziegenbalg, Bartholomeus, 254n  
Zoroaster, 50  
Zoroastrianism, revival of, 266



